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Here Comes The King

A Novel of Henry VIII

Philip Lindsay

About the author

Philip Lindsay was a member of one of Australia's most prominent literary and artistic families. He left Sydney in 1929 and landed in Liverpool with five shillings in his pocket. He managed to eke out a meagre existence while writing his first novel, *Panama is Burning*, which was followed by *Here Comes the King*, a book which proved to be an overnight success and the first of many bestselling historical novels.
In all, Lindsay wrote thirty-nine novels and various works of history and biography in addition to working closely with the late Sir Alexander Korda on many films. He died in 1958.

Also by Philip Lindsay and available in Sphere Books

A PRINCELY KNAVE

QUEEN HONEYPOT

Here Comes the King

PHILIP LINDSAY

SPHERE BOOKS LIMITED
30/32 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8JL

First published in Great Britain by
Ivor Nicholson & Watson Ltd 1933
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First Sphere Books edition 1972
Reprinted 1973

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Set in Linotype Times

Printed in Great Britain by
Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd,
Aylesbury, Bucks

ISBN 0 7221 5533 6

For Frank and Madge Lynch

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Thus as I sat (the tears within my eyen)
Of her the wreck whiles I did debate,
Before my face me-thought I saw this Queen,
No whit as I her left, God wot, of late,
But all be-wept, in black, and poor estate,
Which prayed me that I would ne forget
The fall of her within my book to set.

Cavendish's *Vision of Katharine Howard.*

THE PROLOGUE

CHAPTER ONE

Who sleeps here To-night?

AT THE FOOT of the bed a groom stood stiffly with a torch in one hand, its acrid smell sneaking into every corner of the chamber and clinging to the arras. Already it was quite dark in the room, although the sun still lit up the landscape outside, the open country that surrounded this royal palace of Oatlands. It was a hot night in July—July 28, 1540—and the groom held the torch as far from his white face as possible, but even then he sweated like a candle, and his stiff white collar tickled his neck. It was his task, however, and heat or no heat, he must hold aloft the torch while the King's bed was made, no matter if it was made in broad daylight, at night-time, or in the evening. He was very bored, but he dared not yawn; his muscles painfully tight over the jawbones, his eyes smarting, he stood at attention while His Majesty King Henry VIII's royal double-bed was made.

It took a gentleman usher and four yeomen to make that bed. The gentleman usher, grave Mr. Harman, commanding, directing, the yeomen working. First, a sheet was laid on the rush-covered floor between the groom with the torch and the bed-foot; on this sheet were placed carefully other sheets, blankets, and the down like a film of snow.

A yeoman with a dagger leaped at the straw on the bed, bouncing on the leather-thongs, while he stabbed

at the straw, screwed the weapon in it, swooping suddenly round like a cat, stabbing here, there, quickly, to make sure that no assassin was in hiding.

"That will do," said Mr. Harman.

The yeoman got up reluctantly: he enjoyed doing that. He was expert with the dagger and very proud of his art.

Mr. Harman nodded to Will Sheryngton, the page, and Will took a torch from its iron socket in the wall and set out for food. This being the very important ceremony of bed-making, and not the everyday one, the yeomen were permitted to eat while they worked instead of having to wait until they got outside the door. Hungrily they watched the page go, and licked their lips.

But the bed must be made, the down must be put carefully over the straw and also sifted with a dagger. Mr. Harman stood aside, next to the window, abstracted, his shaking hands clasped together.

They were making the King's bed, seeing that nothing could endanger His Highness's person; and this morning, with these grey eyes of his still smarting with past tears, Mr. Harman had stood near the scaffolding on Tower Hill, behind a burly soldier's steel back, and had watched Tom Cromwell mount the wooden steps. Wyatt, the poet, was beside him: he had not dared meet the poet's eye lest womanliness overmaster his manhood, for he could feel tears behind his lids, and he knew that one glance from Wyatt would bring those tears out. Wyatt was sobbing gently. Cromwell had been hated by those that did not know him, he was cruel and sly and a murderer; Mr. Harman knew all that, but he could not forget that Cromwell had been kind to him. And now this man must die because he had chosen the wrong wife for the King.

Wyatt's sobs grew louder; his hand over his eyes,

he wept openly, defying the spies to note such treason. And on the scaffold, Cromwell had turned his squat body, smiling his twisted contemptuous smile. "Oh, gentle Wyatt," he cried; and suddenly, behind the mask, the iron will was broken and tenderness was in his voice: "Oh, gentle Wyatt, good-bye, and pray to God for me. . . ." Mr. Harman had not dared look up: he heard the voice of Cromwell in the hush of that July morning, in the quietness of a multitude tense with excitement; he heard the clank of armour as the guard turned his heavy shoulder in the pauldron to s e the face of Tom Wyatt who wept so openly for a traitor. There was a pause, then Cromwell's voice came again; the iron was back, the tenderness gone, the old Cromwell spoke in that jeering intonation that, before, so many men had trembled at. "Oh, Wyatt, do not weep," he cried; "if I were not more guilty than you had been when they took you, I should not be in this pass. . . ."

Mr. Harman had not seen the fall of the axe, he did not know if the executioner had been sure or crude; but he felt—so close was he to the scaffold—some hot blood spit upon the hand he held before his eyes; and he heard the murmurous roar of the crowd. Then my Lord Hongreford, traitor, pederast, and ravisher of his own daughter (so it was said), stood up to follow the great Cromwell on the road beyond earth.

Sheryngton, the page, returned with wine and food, and the yeomen now chewed as they made the bed, pausing to take gulps of liquor; Mr. Harman shook aside memories of Cromwell: he had to watch closely lest they put their greasy hands on the linen or on the priceless arras on the walls.

Four yeomen, each holding a corner, were laying the fustian blanket, being careful not to touch the bed itself. It was slow and formal, and very irritating

to Mr. Harman. He stood near the window, not bothering to order the men about, for they knew their duties fully; he wished that this was over so that he could creep away to his chamber and drink that bloody memory away.

Who was in the passage? Who dared to disturb this tremendous ceremony of bed-making?

Pleased for an excuse to be angry, Mr. Harman strode to the door, but before he reached it he saw the white face of young Tom Culpeper, Gentleman of the Privy Chamber, Clerk of the Armoury, peering in from the ante-chamber. Behind him stood Tom Paston, Culpeper's closest friend, standing in the shadows.

"What brings you here, Mr. Culpeper?"

Culpeper gazed inside, his face a little haggard, the black hair falling over his forehead, for it was fully an inch long, contrary to the King's command. He must indeed be worried, thought Mr. Harman, not to have seen his barber, for Culpeper was a dandy and usually most careful of his person. Mr. Harman noted other details: his sleeve had missed a button at the shoulder, the garter on his right leg was loose.

"Is—is this necessary?" said Culpeper at last; "is it usual, this bed-making? Why—why are you doing it?"

Mr. Harman was puzzled what to say. "What do you mean, sir?" he asked. "You should know as well as I—better than I. You sleep in the Privy Chamber."

"I don't sleep there to-night," said Tom Culpeper.

"Oh," said Mr. Harman.

Both could guess what that might mean. This was to be a secret night: the King wanted none to gaze or listen.

"Who is she?" asked Culpeper harshly.

Tom Paston came closer to the light and caught

his friend by the shoulder. The yeomen in the bedchamber had paused in their work and were eating and drinking, listening openly.

"I do not know," said Mr. Harman gently.

"But you can guess!"

Mr. Harman bowed. He felt on all sides pain and terrible suffering. Tom Cromwell this morning had mounted the scaffold with sure steps; he had talked to the people of Catholic things, he who had destroyed the Catholic faith in England; true to his master to the last, with his dying breath he had spoken what his master wished to hear; and all because he had chosen for Queen fat Anne of Cleves, slack-breasted, slack-bellied Anne of Cleves. And now, this youth . . . Mr. Harman, like all the courtiers, knew where Tom Culpeper's bright young eyes had roved, and the King's had roved to the same flower. It was said (though God knew with what truth) that the King would marry the girl now that Anne was divorced from him. Marriage or no, this ostentatious bed-making presaged an important night; and at the moment, there was only one girl for whom this could be done.

"Tom," said Paston gently, "come away, you fool. Come and get drunk."

"I am already drunk," said Culpeper fiercely, and his eyes sought Mr. Harman's with hungry questions; and Mr. Harman kept his head bowed, refusing to answer those questions.

"I received His Highness's commands this morning," he said. "I can tell you no more."

"Nothing more?"

"I said that I am as ignorant as you, sir, more ignorant, perhaps," said Mr. Harman, raising his head and gazing at Culpeper. "You will learn nothing here," he whispered, "but others will. I would go, sir."

Culpeper stood at the door, staring into the bed-chamber as if he could not draw himself away, like a condemned man fascinated by the rack and thumb-screw before they are used upon him.

The yeomen, chunks of bread in their hands, were smiling as widely as they dared; Sheryngton grinned broadly; even the groom with the torch relaxed his pose enough to stare over one shoulder. None attempted to hide his interest.

And the giant double-bed there was naked under the coating of white satin; the curtains were thrown up over the ciel, exposing its great width, its indecent width, with the gold Tudor rose at the foot, and at the head, Henry's coat of arms glaring with bright golds and greens; the jolly-coloured arras, telling in stiff figures the tale of Daphne and Apollo, shook as the wind crept between it and the wall; but the bed dominated the room. How many women had lain in that bed beside the big-limbed roistering King? Queens had lain there . . . and ladies-in-waiting, too . . .

Suddenly Culpeper swung aside, seemed to tear himself physically away from the contemplation of that vast kingly bed; his sunken eyes fixed themselves mournfully for a moment on Mr. Harman's sympathetic face; then he was gone, striding down the ante-chamber, his quick steps sounding very loud in the quiet rooms.

Mr. Harman stood at the door, head bowed under the thought of humanity's ceaseless pain; he heard dimly the steps of the two friends, and behind him the chuckles and whispers of the yeomen. That, to him, epitomised all life: the sneers of the world as it gloated on and fondled the King's double-bed, while love walked alone, hurrying even from friendship; and he stood between them both, touched but inactive.

The rascals would not laugh at another's suffering! He turned swiftly.

"You there!" he cried, "keep your filthy hands from those hangings! What are you waiting for? Get to work!"

Sullenly, the work continued: sheets were laid carefully, not touched by impious hands, or, if touched, marked with the cross and kissed; blankets and more sheets followed; then bolsters and green silk pillows; the sword was laid on the stool at the bed-head.

As they worked in the hot night, lit by the glare of the torch and by the dying sun, making the King's bed, out in the park a man wandered alone: Tom Culpeper.

Soon the bed-chamber was quiet; only the groom remained with his torch, waiting for His Highness . . . waiting for His Highness, for the whisper—"Here comes the King," from the gentlemen in the Privy Chamber. . . . Even Tom Culpeper waited for His Highness, waited for what he dreaded above all things—the coming of the King with a new woman . . . what woman?

The woman was Katharine Howard, the bed was made for her. She came that night, not as a lady-in-waiting to the divorced Anne of Cleves; she came as the Queen of England, although few knew it as yet. At Oatlands that day, while Cromwell rested his shoulders on the block at Tower Hill, while the provincial synod at Canterbury, brought together two months ago to wrangle over Anne's divorce, was being dissolved, Katharine and Henry bowed before Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, hand in hand, the King and Queen of England.

This was what Tom Culpeper had dreaded, for Tom Culpeper loved Kate Howard.

She was very small and very beautiful. Her body

was firmly moulded, her eyes the gentlest colours—blue in some lights, paling to a soft green, and, in sunlight, flecked with gold—modest eyes they were, yet when the mood took her, they sparkled with secret joys. She was an orphan, only eighteen years of age; her eyes were armour that none could see behind, for none could tell her thoughts, they disarmed the questioner with their bold stare of childish innocence.

Her hair was reddish, not the red of copper but of rust, and in texture it was so gossamery, so frail and soft to touch, that Henry had often felt that it must melt against his hot palm as if it were fairy gold. Her nose was turned-up ever so little, and added to her childish look. Her mouth was a kissing mouth, if ever God made one: the upper-lip drawn in a trifle, demurely, the lower-lip heavy, full-blooded: the mouth of a lover and the eyes of a child. Mouth that seemed creased with kissing, red and warm; little well-moulded chin; long throat; broad across the eyes, she was; the hair drawn tightly back, as was the fashion, parted in the centre to show a dazzle of white scalp, and plaited at the back, falling behind the veil of the French hood in gold bands.

She seemed a child in masquerade when you saw her dressed in her mighty velvet gown, split from the waist and opening to show the gaudily embroidered underskirt; jewels at her throat, on her small fingers, over her breast; little Kate Howard at the giant King's side stepped along the corridor of Oatlands that night . . . its mistress. . . .

Pages before her, ladies with her, to her own little chamber; the King to his chamber. The groom with the torch was dismissed, and it was dark when she came to him, this child who thought herself a woman.

By God! King Harry swore in his golden beard,

I'll see that no harm comes to her; God has been good to me at last to give me this rose without a thorn, this rose without a thorn!

All petals, she was; petalled lips, soft as a petal, trembling as if in a gentle wind; petalled skin stretched over such small bones; shy little mouth; frightened fingers. . . .

Indeed, his rose without a thorn!

THEY had been married by Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester; Kate's uncle, Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, standing as sponsor. Kate did not like Norfolk, few women liked him. He was a soldier, and had contempt for femininity; love was, to him, something peculiar and idiotic, to be used brutally in the fight for power.

They were married at Oatlands, quite close to Hampton Court. Henry had hurried the ceremony on; he wanted to forget that Thomas Cromwell was to die this day; but at the same time he did not want to announce a new wife following so closely on the annulment of his marriage with Anne of Cleves. Oatlands had been built for Anne; it was yet unfinished, and the foundations were bedded in the earth for over fourteen acres; it spread and meandered, darting up here and there into turrets and gables. The men had toiled day and night to finish it in time, dragging materials from the nearby monasteries that were now in ruins, bringing stone from Chertsey and Bisham Abbey, marble from Abington, brick of a brilliant red being baked swiftly at Woking. Henry stacked the half-built palace with the warmest tapestries from France and Flanders, with the richest Turkey carpets. It spread, broad and powerful, towards the river, near Weybridge. You entered through the gates into a splendid court flanked with flat muddled buildings; the front rose into a great

turreted gatehouse, beyond which lay the palace itself. And from brick walls flowed the glorious green terraces rippling with fountains that led to the pleasance and the orchards, and beyond that, to the deer park.

Here, quietly, in this half-built palace meant for Anne of Cleves, Katharine Howard was married to Henry VIII, King of England and France, Lord of Ireland; and here, Mr. Harman had seen that the bed was made and was blessed with Holy Water; here, Tom Culpeper drank his full weekly bouge of wine until sleep wiped away all thought.

CHAPTER TWO

Queen, but not Crowned

SHE WAS NOT QUEEN YET. She had no State apartments. She was, to all the visitors and courtiers in the King's new palace of Oatlands, but a relation staying with the Duke of Norfolk. She lived in Norfolk's apartments, mothered by her cousin, Norfolk's daughter, Mary, Duchess of Richmond and Somerset, Countess of Nottingham, the widow of Henry's illegitimate son, the brilliant Richmond. It was perfectly correct, no slander could touch her th[illegible].

Culpeper sought her out as soon as he decently could after breakfast.

Norfolk's ante-chambers were crowded, for all suspected what few were sure of. As Culpeper came through the wide curtained doorway, he frowned to see the mob of gaily dressed men and women being over-respectful to the little wench whose eyes glittered with impudent importance. She sat on cushions by a tall oriel window, her cousin Mary on a stool beside her, and men were all about her, their swords like frozen white tails poking out behind them, pushing up the short cloaks.

How could he speak to her in all this flurry, amidst so many watching eyes?

He stood apart, fingering the keys of the virginal, yet not pressing them; and there Kate noticed him.

She sent her cousin, Surrey, the poet, to call him, and Culpeper started when the handsome young gallant's hand tapped him on the shoulder.

"I've not come to call you to a murder," laughed Surrey. "Don't stare so, lad. Our pretty coz, Mistress Kate, wants to say Good Morning and God Speed to you. Drinking again! Your hand trembles!"

"What's it got to do with you if I drink?"

"Nothing," said Surrey, shrugging. "But you must not keep a lady waiting."

So he was forced to go to her where she sat on a pile of coloured cushions, amidst that crowd of grinning, fawning men; he was forced to hold his tongue and to lean down to kiss her mouth quite casually, as if that kiss meant nothing beyond mere courtesy.

"You're looking well, Kate," he said, striving to make his voice normal.

"And you," she said, "are looking really awful! Get married, Thomas; late nights aren't good for men."

"Kate," he said, and scarcely knew what he spoke: "Kate, could I see you for one moment alone? I've something that you should hear, something important."

"Of course, Thomas." Kate was on her feet instantly. "Come, to this corner, here."

"My dear," said the Duchess of Richmond, laying a hand on her bejewelled sleeve and gazing into her face imploringly; but Kate smiled gaily at her.

"Thomas and I were babies together," she laughed, "and have romped together as brother and sister since our nativities. You must not be too strict a guardian, Mary, or—or I'll try not to like you."

The Duchess answered her smile with a kiss. It was impossible to think evil of such a wench. She had heard ugly rumour in the family, but when you were with Kate you could not credit such talk. She was still only a child, with a child's bold innocence and lack of understanding.

"For the last time, dear," she whispered as she kissed her.

Culpeper had her alone, had her boxed away in one corner, all to himself; the others could not hear, but they could see; from all sides, men and women were watching, eager to note the slightest irregularity, striving to catch a single word. How could a man make love by words alone without the help of action? Love was no thing of words: words mean nothing except as music to the body's acting, they are dull things, without fire, and the listener's blood must be warm and quick to interpret them.

"Kate," he whispered fiercely, "do you remember that I asked your hand in marriage?"

Into those blue eyes, those merry eyes, there wavered a look of fear. "I remember," she said softly.

"And you said to me: 'Wait, I am young yet. This is my first real glimpse of Court. Wait until I am a little older.' Do you remember saying that?"

"Yes, I remember."

He could scarcely hear the words, so low was her voice.

"And now," he said, "I've come again for an answer. There are witnesses here. Put your hand in mine, speak out so that all can hear you, and plight your troth with me. Then no other man can take you."

"You mustn't talk like that."

"I can't help it, I love you." Torture to whisper and not to touch her, agonizing to see those lips so near, to see that young body buried in satins and velvets, scarred with jewels, so close to him, so very far away. If only he could clasp even her plump little hand! . . . ah, God! . . . "You must plight me," he said, his voice growing stronger. "I'll do something terrible if you don't."

"Not so loud. You don't know what you're saying."

"I do, I want you."

"Ah, God, be quiet." She pulled at the velvet strings that tied her hood underneath her chin, undid them, and sucked them between her teeth, then suddenly she twisted aside towards the wall, so that the watchers would not see the pain in her eyes and the twisted mouth, holding back tears. "It is too late," she whispered.

"Too late? Then what I feared is true? The King married you?"

"It's a secret. We were married yesterday."

He did not see her face, she was turned from him, but he heard the catch in her voice.

So it was true! He had feared it, he had known it, yet the blow now that it fell was terrible in its finality.

He bowed and said, "I'll plague you no more. I'll try never to see you again. I've received orders from the King, your royal husband, to arrange the paling of some of his parks, and I can go to the Armoury at Greenwich. It's all unimportant, and doesn't need my presence, but I'll go."

"If you think it best . . ."

"It's come to that, has it? You've ordered me to go?"

"What right have you to talk?" She still spoke over her shoulder so that he could not see her face, but her voice sounded as hard and as bitter as his own. "I'll speak truth," she murmured harshly. "When first I saw you again, when I was but a maid to the Queen, I watched you, but you avoided me, always. Then one afternoon you caught me alone in the passage; you were very drunk, and you asked me to marry you. Months ago that was, months and months ago. Probably you forget? I saw nothing

of you after that until now. Are you mad, or are you drunk again?"

"Both," said Culpeper. "I loved you from the very first but I dared not speak to you. I am a coward, a dirty coward. I drink to give myself courage. If you'd only said yes when I was drunk that day. . . . Let's not talk about it. Perhaps it wouldn't have mattered. Anne Bullen was betrothed to Northumberland, but what difference did it make? Better to leave it like this. But why did you marry him? Do you love him?"

"He is so kind . . ."

"But do you love him?"

"How can one answer a question like that? I can only say I don't know."

"That means you don't." Even now, although she was his Queen, he felt hope flicker in his heart. There was a chance yet to make her love him.

"It means," she answered coldly, "that I'll do all that a girl can do to love him."

"You're a child, and he's old, old as the devil, almost fifty. Fat and old. Wait till you've seen his leg! That was my task once, to tend his leg. Why do you think fat Anne was so pleased to get out? —and she wasn't a child like you. King or no King, he's a fat man with a wretched leg."

"You mustn't speak like that!"

"I will . . ."

Suddenly there was a great flurry in the chamber. They heard the gentlemen usher at the door shout in the silence, "Knights, ladies, gentlemen, gentlewomen, attend the King, His Royal Highness by the Grace of God, Henry VIII, King of England . . ."

"Here comes the King," she panted, swinging back the long veil, "go away."

"And have them all asking why I left you?"

"Then bow, you fool, bow!"

Everybody was bowing, sliding on to one knee as Henry came into the chamber, leaning on his staff, and smiling . . .

Here comes the King, and with the coming of the King, all life must stop, the very air must thicken as if congealed in awe of this gross man who hobbled painfully on his tall staff, nodding and smiling, blinking every second. . . .

Culpeper swore a great oath as he saw those fat legs in their red stockings come closer, he swore an oath that he would cut this love out of his heart if he needed a knife to do it with ; he swore that he would leave this court, would take arms, perhaps abroad. . . . He would not live, he said, to see his little Kate Howard become Her Highness Katharine Queen of England.

PART ONE

CHAPTER THREE

At the King's Mercy

AGAIN THE BED is being made, but now the yeomen shivered in their thick clothes. Mr. Harman had shut the window securely and had pulled down the iron latch with all his strength ; it was very draughty in that great room, but the fire was not yet lit, for coals were too expensive to waste on yeomen, and the household accounts were made up to a speck of dust. It was January 1541, and Hampton Court—new building though it was—could be draughty enough, although by no means as chilly as old Windsor, where the great winds hustled up the hill, gripped your ears with icy fingers and strove to pluck you off the narrow stairways. Yet Hampton Court was cold these winter days : its five great courts were boxes that clapped the winds in with three sides ; the painted vanes on the chimneys whirled around like dragon-flies ; the tapestries rustled against the walls like dead leaves falling.

While the great bed was being made—no mystery now, no sly questions : it was for Henry and his Queen, Katharine—Tom Culpeper sat in a narrow barge, muffled up with cloaks, coming from London along the quiet Thames to Hampton Court.

It was very dark, and a soft rain was falling, but it was not only the cold or the wet that made his face so white, his eyes so dull, and his lips so bloodless ;

his hand on the gunwale shivered as if he were an old, old man, not a gay spright of twenty. He sat with a long cloak up to his ears, with the thin brim of the flat round hat on his head pulled forward over his eyes. An iron lanthorn shone on the prow of the boat, glittering on the water that was smashed by the oars into a myriad bubbles. The rowers grunted, shifting their weight, their breath rasping in their throats; now and then, one would hawk and spit over the side. They were weary, having rowed all the way, and this was not their first trip since morning. It was a hired boat and therefore rather uncomfortable; the canvas awning above Culpeper's head was thin, and the rain dripped through steadily as if from a broken pipe, the sodden cushions were more painful to sit on than the wooden thwarts, and he had thrown them behind him.

He was numbed, not only with cold, but with shame; his head ached as if metal revolved continually inside it. He picked up the flagon at his feet and shook it, although he knew that it was now empty; then he groaned, let the flagon fall, and shut his eyes upon the darkness. He opened them again almost immediately, but everything remained the same, he still found himself crawling over the Thames on a wet night, the rowers gasping before him, the oars squeaking in their rowlocks, the water lap-lapping at the gunwale.

Every second drew him nearer to Hampton Court, towards the King and Katharine the Queen.

They had not spoken to each other after that day, she and Tom Culpeper. In fact, except for those two occasions, they had never spoken more than harmless words since they were children and had played together, cousins, in his father's manor at Holingborne in Kent. He could scarcely remember those days, they had been so long ago, for when she

was still very young, Kate had left Holingborne for Horsham, to live with her father's stepmother, the Dowager-Duchess of Norfolk. All that he could recollect of her as she then had been, was the touch of her sticky little hand, the wet, formless kiss of her baby-mouth, and the dark, flushed face—vague memories that stirred in him a passionate yearning to be a child again, to re-enter that mysterious world where intimacy is unfettered by blundering bodies, where comradeship is real and not disturbed by the secrecy of words. He had grown up, but she had not changed. When suddenly he saw her, a little over a year ago, first a maid in the train of Princess Mary, and later in the train of Anne of Cleves, he had met her exactly as if she were the same youngling who had played with him in the garden of Holingborne; she was still a child, still unreserved and still untouched by words or glances, with the careless innocence of a girl who does not know the traps that looking can lead one into, who does not understand that there is danger in a kiss pressed too hard in greeting.

Tom Culpeper was a coward, and the torture of his life was that he knew he was a coward. It was this cowardice that whipped him on, when drunk, into the most dangerous adventures. And nowadays he drank heavily, almost all the time. Drink did not show as yet in his delicate, almost feminine, features; and only rarely did his friends know when he was not sober. Sometimes his dull blue eyes would glint with lust or dull with murder—those were danger-signals, but otherwise his face remained as impassive as a saint's.

Drink was his protection. Without it warming his heart, he felt like a man naked in the snow.

Because all his wealth, even his life, depended upon the King's patronage, he drank but little when at Court. The King loved him, that he knew; he had

been given manors and abbeys, he was Clerk of the Armoury, and he slept in the King's ante-chamber, sometimes even on a truckle-bed at the foot of the royal double-bed, when the King was lonely ; sometimes he helped the King to dress—a coveted post—and he had cleansed the sores on the kingly leg, swathed them in bandages and seen that the physician's commands were carried out. He was loved and respected, and therefore avoided drink when in service, but even then he would now and again steal to some village tavern and drink himself into a rancorous sleep.

And since Kate Howard, his pretty cousin, had come to Court, he drank more even than ever. He had thought hopefully of marrying her as he watched her flutter around the dull-eyed Princess or the brief Queen Anne, or saw her in the stately pavane, very solemn, or leaping with nimble limbs in the jolly galliard ; but he had not spoken to her. Mayhap he would never have spoken to her had he not got drunk, and being drunk, of course the wench refused to say yes to his desires.

King Henry had first noticed her shortly after his marriage with Anne. It was at a feast at the Bishop of Winchester's, where Kate's youth, her childish height, and innocent blue-grey eyes had made her look so frail beside the big-boned, fallen-fleshed body of Flanders Anne, that Henry could not help but notice her. Was it chance, Culpeper wondered, that the meeting had happened at Winchester's, or was it all planned by the Howards ?—for Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, had as patron the Catholic Duke of Norfolk, Kate's uncle.

The King's painted barge had crept over the Thames, the King in cloth of gold and twinkling at every movement with a hundred brilliant coloured jewels, and always the barge drew up at the steps of

Gardiner's house. Culpeper had been sometimes in his suite, but he did not join the gambols. He stood apart, watching with melancholy eyes the passing of the woman who had never been his. His friend, Tom Paston, and he would drink and jeer at the gay, loving King.

It was a trick of Gardiner's, they said, of Norfolk's; they were working against Tom Cromwell, shuffling the chess-board of politics, fighting with one Queen against another—a Catholic Queen against a Protestant Queen to capture a King who was both and might be either. Gardiner, with Norfolk at his shoulder, played against Tom Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, with Cromwell at his shoulder. Both playing with a Queen to catch a King; Gardiner held the little lovely Queen with blue-grey eyes and gentle mouth. Cranmer was badly handicapped by his coarse Queen with the dry lips, the heavy-lidded eyes, and coarsely moulded nose. A Protestant Queen and a Catholic Queen! How Culpeper and Paston sneered together with the lofty cynicism of youth! They sat in the King's beflagged barge as it steered in the moonlight always towards Gardiner's steps.

"She is waiting for him in there," Culpeper would say, "waiting for him and his sore leg," and he would laugh bitterly.

But he made no move to catch her for himself until that day when he was drunk and met her in the passage. She gazed with merry eyes at him and laughed and put him off. She thought it only a drunken frolic when he had been so terrifically serious. After that, he followed the King with his head high in his laced collar: a courtier, cynical in all things of the flesh and the spirit. That was on the surface; and only that other Tom, Tom Paston, knew what rage and jealousy there was behind the calm, white, clean-shaven mask.

Under the silken awning of the King's barge in the moonlight on the Thames, Henry and his little Kate had laughed together, the courtiers a little farther off, except that occasionally small, lean-visaged Howard, Duke of Norfolk, with his heavy, slanting eyes and cruel mouth, would join in the merriment with his niece; or Cranmer, squat, dark, and heavily jowled, would show his long teeth, grinning, always friendly to the favourite. Beside the officious Gardiner, Cranmer looked small and insignificant, but his was the insignificance of the poison in the cup that, because of its harmless look, is taken contemptuously; he and Cromwell, both squat men, both determined and quiet in their ways, fondled the merry little favourite although they knew that she was death to them.

Death, indeed, she was to Cromwell. His dark head fell on Tower Hill, and the Catholics gained power. It seemed that Cranmer must follow Cromwell, but he who had slipped aside when his pupil, Anne Boleyn, felt the axe on her little neck, slipped aside now that his comrade followed Anne. Nothing could break Cranmer, because he moved with the wind; resilent and swift, the wind might blow him down, but it never snapped him. Now while Gardiner and Norfolk stood with Henry, Cranmer was seemingly down before the Catholic wind, but he had not yet touched earth, and he was moving gradually upright, back to power. A dangerous enemy was Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, particularly for so heedless a girl as Katharine Howard.

Slowly, this wet night, Culpeper's barge rocked towards Hampton Court. How would Kate greet him? how else than with the same innocent smile, the same bold glance from her blue-grey eyes? Could he kiss his cousin in greeting now that she was Queen of England? Of course not. Yet everybody

kissed in England, rich and simple, high and low; mouths met every day in glancing kisses, kisses of greeting. . . . But could one touch a Queen's lips even in the unpressed kiss of courtesy?

He had not seen her since that morning after her marriage. Immediately he had rushed to the King's park at Penshurst, then to the North Park at Lee, and off from Lee to his home, at Holingborne, and while at Holingborne he had committed the vilest act that he had ever done, and had been sentenced to die for it, as he deserved. But a pardon had arrived suddenly from the King, although he had not solicited it. Probably Tom Paston had arranged it.

Paston had kept him posted with Court gossip. After he had proclaimed his marriage last August, Henry had carried his jewel of womanhood—as he openly called Kate—off to Windsor, and from Windsor had sported round the countryside to Reading, Ewelm, Rycott, Notley, Buckingham, Grafton, Ampthill, More Park, back to Windsor, then to Oking, and from Oking to Christmas at Hampton Court.

Culpeper had heard much more, for in his letters Paston had told every detail of Court life. Kate, he wrote, refused to wear the high-necked Spanish dresses and showed her figure in lewder French gowns, around her arms she wore her device embroidered on silk: "*Non autre volonte que la sienne*" ("No other will than his"). Although young and jolly and careless enough, she was no spendthrift; Henry had wasted so much money celebrating his marriage with fat Anne of Cleves that he had been forced to be niggardly with Kate, but she did not seem to care. Although the Court was the gayest he had known—so gay, in fact, that at Ampthill Henry had been forced to issue an order to his vice-chamberlain, Robert Tyrwit, and to the Queen's vice-chamberlain, Sir Edward Baynton, demanding that better order be

kept in Kate's Presence Chambers—it was the gaiety of youth, said Paston, that is merry because of its own high spirits and not because of the plenitude of gold. "It is merry England now," he wrote to Culpeper, "and well may the Pope flourish if he bringeth such laughter into Court. Cranmer cannot keep to the jig, nor for the matter of that, can the Duke of Norfolk, but it pleaseth the Duke more than the Archbishop. I would thou wert here to laugh with us. She hath the littlest and the prettiest teeth in her gob that ever have I seen, and marry, lad, it is a kissing-time."

That letter was in his shirt now. When he pressed his shaking hand against his chest he heard the paper crinkle. What had Paston meant by writing such things to him! for Paston was the one man in the world who knew how greatly Culpeper loved Kate.

And every second drew him closer to Kate. The blades of the oars scooped into the Thames and flung pearls at the dark sky, jerking him closer, ever closer, to the Queen with the littlest and prettiest of teeth. How could he face her with this sin beating under his temples? Paston was to blame. He shouldn't have written such words; they had driven Culpeper to continuous drinking and had sent him into the cold, wet woods with his roisterers where the plump wench had been found wandering. Even now he could see her face in the moonlight, the black depth of her open mouth as she shrieked before it was hidden under the firm hand of that rascal, Tom Alred; but her eyes, blurred with tears, still gazed at him with horror although Alred's dirty hand was cupped over her mouth. Wretch, wretch that he was. . . . He shuddered in his cloak and shut his eyes to forget that picture. . . . Poor wench, poor little wench. . . . He was a rat, a dog. No word was vile enough to call him by. Never in all his life would he forget that

woman's eyes, wide with incredulous horror, bright with tears; her hand beating at the grass while Johnny Hubbard gripped the wrist and jeered at her. She had been married only a week or two to such a splendid fellow, a gamekeeper.

He opened his eyes abruptly, hoping that the night air would drive away such memories; and he saw very close to him the murky glitter of lights . . . the lights of Hampton Court.

The palace seemed to have sprung out of the night. It had been all blackness when he shut his eyes, black sky and the blacker shadow that was earth, and now before him was a yellow rash on the night, the lighted windows of Hampton Court.

O God, he would be seeing her soon!

THE men sighed and breathed more freely as the barge glided to the tower that rose between straight-flanked turrets. They passed under the arch, and the oars rattled on the stone, before the boat was halted against a set of stone steps, green and slimy. A torch in its iron bracket spat resin on them, and one of the rowers cursed as a drop stung his naked hand.

Culpeper saw the blue sleeves of a soldier, the light burning like fire on his ridged cuirass, quivering on the leaf-shaped head of his short boar-spear, and shining on the crimson velvet and fringe of red silk under the steel cross-bar as if the blade sweated out blood.

"It is I," said Culpeper, rising unsteadily from under the awning, "Master Thomas Culpeper of the Privy Chamber."

The man peered down; feeling weary, he grunted a wordless answer, while Culpeper leaped out of the boat on to the steps. He had paid his fare in advance, and the barge glided off even as he leaped from it, and left him perched on the stone step.

The soldier stood aside to let him pass, but Culpeper

was in no hurry. The thought of facing Henry and Katharine was like physical pain to him.

She must know all about it. Henry was not the man to have delicacy in a matter even so shameful as this : he would laugh and blab the tale to everybody. Culpeper felt that he had rather been hanged than have been saved by Henry ; not that he did not love the man and reverence the King : he did both ; few who knew Henry could help loving him. Violent-tempered he was, often cruel, and very vain : he did not hide his faults : but underneath the exterior of coarse and violent King, there was a manliness about him, a kindness and a joviality that few could resist. Culpeper loved him, and had cause to love him.

" Do you need any help ? " said the soldier suddenly, thinking him drunk.

Culpeper jerked up his head and glared at the fellow.

" Quiet, rascal," he snarled, " or you'll pay for it."

The soldier did not reply. He rattled the steel of his boar-spear against the wall as he strode the narrow stone platform, and whistled softly to himself a rousing drinking song, just to show how little he cared for the threats of gentlemen.

Culpeper watched him, eager for a chance to vent his rage, but the soldier gave no further opportunity : he walked up and down in a leisurely and peculiarly insolent manner, but he said nothing.

And Culpeper felt ashamed. His nerves were in tatters. Anything rubbed against them and made him irritable. Wrapping his cloak about him, he leaped up the stairs and strode swiftly down the corridor in the tower to the narrow Water Gallery that was unlit and seemed as black as ebony. There was no possibility of getting lost, for the Gallery ran straight, but Culpeper felt a stupid terror in his throat as he walked.

With the reaction of weeks of drinking, even the

faint moonlight glimmer of the square windows seemed to him the huge eyes of a demon watching for one false step before it pounced; the darkness was evil, it hid devils and God knew what. He railed at himself for being a coward, yet he could not kill his fear although he knew that there was nothing to fear. Nobody was in the Gallery: the softest footfall echoed on the tiles like thunder; and as for devils—although the Church said they existed, he had never yet known a man to be hurt by one. Why then was he afraid? and of what? He could not tell; only he knew that he hurried through the darkness, and as he hurried, he gripped his sword-hilt firmly.

The Great Round Arbour on the Mount, being mainly windows in all its three stories—save for the lead cupola—was lighter than the Gallery, and he paused there to regain his breath, to draw himself to his full height and to shake his fears away, shuddering, like a dog shaking the water from its back.

Then he strode into the gardens, swaggering.

THERE was dancing in the Great Hall. Culpeper crept quietly up the stairs to change, and fled along the gallery that ran from the west front by the moat to Cardinal Wolsey's old rooms on the east. It was a very narrow gallery with windows looking out on to the first court—the Base Court, as it was called. Culpeper's was the end chamber, nearest the late Cardinal's.

Quick as he was, he was seen, and he had barely entered his chamber and taken basin and ewer out of the hanging cupboard, before the tapestries over the door were swung aside and Tom Paston entered, both hands out to greet his friend.

"Why didn't you tell us you were coming?" he cried. "There's no fire, and you're drenched. Lucky it's laid. We must get a light."

Before Culpeper could stop him—for he had blessed the darkness that hid mirrors from his shameful gaze—Paston was out of the door and back again with a candle stolen from the chamber next to Culpeper's. He put the light against the tinder in the grate and blew on it until a little flame crawled out of the wood and licked tentatively at the thin layer of coals, before it leaped up in a rush of red and yellow. The room stank of old rushes: evidently no fresh ones had been brought since he left here four months ago. It smelt like dead flesh, sweet and tart.

As the flames caught at the coals and sent long, flickering shadows on the cheap, faded tapestries, Tom Culpeper hurriedly pulled his clothes off until he was naked; then he rubbed the blood back into his veins with a damask towel.

Paston took the only stool in the room, leaned it against the wall and sat on it, hugging one knee and watching his friend without speaking. The candle he set on a small wooden table that held scents and pomades of the toilet and a narrow, unframed steel mirror. And there, its gentle radiance showed against the steel and against the thin gold wire of the tapestries.

"Candles always make me think of God," said Paston. "They have the same undisturbed and beautiful light; men are torches, spluttering and snarling."

Culpeper did not bother to answer. He felt better now that the blood began to warm under his skin. He squared his shoulders before the fire and stretched his tired legs; then from the large oak chest in one corner he drew out the clothes he needed, selecting them carefully.

As Culpeper sat back on his haunches, frowning into the chest, Paston spoke again, not liking this unnatural silence.

"You have strangely little to say for a man absent

so long," he said carelessly. "No questions to ask? no tales to tell?"

"No, only one to hide," said Culpeper harshly, deciding at last on a green velvet doublet, and drawing it carefully out of its covering of lavender-bags.

That silenced Paston; he fidgeted, smoothing his short, square black beard and watching his friend uneasily. Culpeper did not speak. He slipped a white linen shirt decorated with green braid over his head and shook his arms through the holes. The frilled, embroidered collar he laced up tightly to his hairless chin.

"Let's drink," he said suddenly. He darted to a corner and drew out a stone pottle. Being full, it was heavy, and it needed a strong effort to lift it to the small table on which stood some pewter cups amongst the pomades.

"I don't want any," said Paston. "I at least know when I've had enough," but he did not stop his friend from filling two cups, and he drank his quickly enough when it was filled.

"To the little-toothed one!" cried Culpeper with a stupid laugh as he swilled his.

"Be careful," said Paston. "Remember where you are."

"Remember!" cried Culpeper, diving into the chest and dragging out his blue woollen stockings with their velvet tops. "Can I forget, man! You know my heart, yet you caution me to remember! To think that I held her in my arms as a child and never knew, never realised what a jewel I held! Ah, to be a child again, Paz, with a man's knowledge, eh? What havoc we'd work! Give me a drink."

"You've had enough."

"I'm not drunk. I can walk that crack in the floor from wall to wall without a stumble. Watch!"

"That's why you shouldn't drink. Let me look at

your eyes. Yes, bloodshot, and there's that devil in them!"

"Is there a devil there, Paz? A real rousing devil? I've been cramped up, looking at stone walls and barren woods until I thought I'd go mad! To see a lovely prinked-up woman again, jetting across a dance-room! I've dreamed of it, Paz! The dirty tavern-wenches, green-backed milkmaids, country jades, I'm sick of them. I like a city dame, a Court lady. Don't talk of country wenches. She was only married a few weeks, they told me afterwards." Swiftly he tied the ribbons of the violet breeches to the blue stocking-tops, and poured out another drink. "You heard all about it, of course? You got me the pardon, I suppose?"

Paston shook his head. "I tried, but he refused me. Then suddenly he changed, he pardoned without asking. Somebody higher than I must have asked him. But he always loved you, Tom; you're like a son to him, and he can be merciful if he pleases and if State affairs aren't in the balance."

Culpeper came close to his friend. "Do you think," he whispered, "do you think that *she* asked him?"

"No!" cried Paston with unnecessary violence. "Why the devil should she? You're nothing to her!"

"Eyes have spoken. Why should I love her so unless she loves me too?"

"You don't love her; you never really cared a groat for her until he took her. It's only the devil in you that makes you whimper for a thing you can't get."

"Who says I can't get her? I tell you, she loves me or I wouldn't be loving her so terribly. A man knows, he feels it inside him when a woman loves him. Love's not a thing of words, a glance is sufficient to tell everything. And even if she is a Queen——"

"Quiet, you fool!"

"Even if she is a Queen, she is still a woman. You think she's beyond me. Nothing's beyond a brave man. Look at Launcelot and Guinevere! He grabbed her up before the whole Court while the faggots were piled up to her thighs ready for the torch. It's only in our cowardly modern days that men shrink from Queens."

"And Weston and the others? They got the axe with pretty Annie!"

"I'm not afraid of the axe! You think I'm a coward, don't you?"

"I don't, by any means!" cried Paston, knowing only too well how dangerous that argument was with Culpeper. Like a small boy, you had only to dare him to do anything, and he did it, rather than be thought a coward. "Nobody'd say a word against your courage!"

"You could, if you wished. Remember that day out hunting when I ran from the boar? There'd have been no Tom Culpeper here now if you hadn't been so handy with your spear. I ran like a woman, skidding on the wet earth because a boar showed its tusks at me."

"Every man's got a weakness. Yours is boars. Now, I can't bear a height. Put me on top of a tower and I'll weep to be carried down."

"Underneath, you all think me a coward. I know. That time in the tennis play when I ducked my head from the ball, everybody jeered at me."

"A tennis ball's no joke, it's as hard as rock. . . ."

Culpeper seized the pottle and his cup, but Paston caught his arm.

"You mustn't!" he cried. "You've got to see the King. You usedn't to drink at Court. You've had enough."

"I can't have enough. Do you realise I've got to

face a million sniggers because of that affair? He won't let it drop. What must she think of me? I couldn't enter that Hall sober. It'd kill me."

"That, Tom, is not the act of a brave man."

Culpeper slowly lowered the pottle and stared gravely at his friend. "No, Paz, you're right," he said, and flung the cup against the wall. "I won't drink any more. I'll face the lot, and under his damned nose I'll steal his wench—Queen or harlot, I don't care!"

Paston bit his moustaches, unsure what to say. Argument, he knew, was more dangerous than silence. Culpeper lived in terror of being thought a coward, and the most careless word threw him often into the craziest gestures.

"I'll write her a note. I'll slip it into her hand, right under his eyes. You watch me."

He dragged an iron box from under the table, swung it open and pulled out paper, pen, and ink.

"What'll I say?" he cried. "What words? Help me, Paz. What's the most powerful love magic you know? There are really only three words—I Love You."

He tore a piece from the edge of the paper and wrote on it with large, bold letters the three words of eternal magic: "I love you," and added, "I must see you as soon as you can." Then he held it up, and crouching back on his haunches, kissed it loudly and with a flourish.

"You're not going to give her that?" cried Paston.

"I am. You see."

"You're mad!"

"I am in love!"

Paston was on his feet, white with anxiety and fear. Only with a strong effort did he stop himself from wrenching the note out of Culpeper's hand and flinging it into the fire. A quarrel, he realised, would

only make Culpeper more obstinate; the one way to stop him was to leave him. When alone, without the necessity of acting the brave man to impress somebody, he might return to sanity.

"Play the fool if you wish," he said with a shrug. "I'll be no party to it."

"Don't go, Paz, don't leave me . . ."

Paston did not answer; he swung aside the tapestry over the door and walked out noisily to show his complete detachment.

Culpeper was alone, and now that he was alone, the note in his hand seemed indeed a stupid thing, a schoolboy trick. Before the fire he knelt and gazed blankly at the square letters as a man might look at his own imminent death—with a despair so deep that it did not show.

Music in the Great Hall. On the dais, the King lounged on the great chair that was embroidered with the royal arms of England. Around him were clustered his councillors and friends, some sitting, some standing, while in the Hall itself the couples moved in the slow, dignified pavane. Above the screens, in the Musicians' Gallery, directly opposite the dais, the players crooned into hautbois or shattered the gentle tune with the blast of a trumpet. And the couples moved delicately, fawning on each other, around the great open hearth in the floor that roared and clattered with burning logs, smoke whirling upwards to the painted louvre. Now, at night, the colours of the roof could not be seen, for the winter moon was not strong enough to glide its light through the glazed lower-panels of the louvre and to show the stars painted there; and in the smoke, the hammer-beams and beautifully carved pendants seemed like black icicles ready to drip on to the dancers. There were candles in sconces on the walls, candles on

tables; in the window-alcove, torches rattling and spluttering in brackets; and the smoke rolled in thick clouds upwards to the louvre, stinging the people's eyes, dirtying their clothes and faces, obscuring the musicians in their fantastic costumes.

Candles stood on the raised step, or halpace, under the tall bay window on the right of the dais, shedding their soft light on the green and white tiles, on the oak panelling and on the coloured window-panes, set in red iron lockets. Near this window, the King lounged on his embroidered chair. He was a giant of a man, nearly four inches over six feet, this English King. His heavy legs were stretched before him and hidden in scarlet stockings, the wide feet in flat-toed red velvet shoes, slashed to reveal pink lining. He was clothed all in shades of red, like a gigantic ruby, like a splash of blood in the yellow candle-shine. Even his curved short beard was reddish gold, although flecked now with white. His wide, square-sided face was red, flushed with drinking and over-eating, netted in thin veins; the small mouth tight set—a red scratch on the face.

A giant, a red giant, he lolled in his chair, stretching the big chest that rustled with scarlet lacework. The crimson cap on his pointed bald head was pushed back from the high curving forehead. On the table beside him was a dish of raisins, and he picked at them, flicking them into his little mouth and spitting the seeds on to the floor while he talked and laughed with his friends, but ever as he talked, his golden eyes moved ceaselessly about the dancers, watching one body there, a little body but a queenly one, the body of Katharine Howard.

Around him were the great men of his realm. Chief amongst them was Mr. Secretary, Sir Thomas Wriothesley, a man out more for himself than for others, lean and quick-witted and very cruel; then

the Catholic Duke of Norfolk, that small, dark man with the heavy eyes and the disdainful mouth—a brutal soldier and a brave man, he scorned to hold his tongue ; next to him stood that perfect gentleman, Sir Anthony Browne, Master of the Horse, another of the Catholic party, gentle and brave and very honest ; Hertford, the brother of the late Queen, Jane Seymour, a brilliant rogue ; Audeley, a hard man but an honest one. Neither Cranmer nor Gardiner was there, Cranmer being about his own affairs and Gardiner having been sent as Ambassador Extraordinary to Charles V.

Henry threw the raisins into his little mouth and spat out the seeds. He wished that he was dancing. He had been a great dancer, able to dance and leap for hours. His body had never tired in those days ; and it would have been as strong now, but for that accursed joust when his Great Horse fell upon his leg and smashed open the knotted veins. It ached badly at the moment, for music seemed to irritate it, to work into the blood and make the ulcers throb ; but with his great will, he refused to let the pain dominate him. The dance was for Kate, and she could dance till she fell : he would not interfere.

His quick little eyes watched everything as, hand in hand, the dancers moved, bowing and simpering, in the pavane, that stately peacock dance, the gallants' swords cocked out behind them. The bodies straight, only the legs moved, slowly, on tip-toe, then firm-footed, wheeling gradually round, the man's left hand always pressing on his sword-hilt. Two simple and a double one forward, two simple and a double one forward. . . . Henry nodded his head to the tune, recalling old days, jolly days, roistering days at Jericho. . . .

A man had come through the screens and was edging past the dancers towards the dais ; a young

man with his proud dark head in air, his face flushed.

"Tom Culpeper!" cried the King. "Tom's back with us!"

The men around him stared at the lad. They smiled amusedly, and seeing those smiles, the flush darkened in Culpeper's cheeks, the mouth tightened, the chin became more tilted.

Slowly he mounted the dais and bowed profoundly before the lounging giant.

"Why, it's months and months since we saw your pretty face," said Henry, smiling. "You took full advantage of your leave. What kept you so busy?"

"I have been about your grace's affairs," said Culpeper, and even as he spoke he realised the enormity of his remark, and stood perfectly still, appalled.

All watched Henry for the cue, and it came quickly in a bellow of great laughter; fortunately, Henry was in a good humour; he flung back his head and seemed to flounder under his own noise, his whole body shaking.

"Where's Sommers?" he cried, when laughter let him speak. "Where's Will Sommers? Give up your bells, Will; here's one better than you at the task!"

Will Sommers, the jester, with his dark, intelligent face, leaned over his master's chair and leered at Culpeper. He was dressed in a kind of monkish habit of dark brown fustian, with the cowl slopping on to his narrow shoulders.

"Marry, Squire," said he—for so he often called his King—"I'd change with Master Tom at a wink. I doubt if he'd do my task as well as I'd do his, and with these two arms. I'd not need eight more when your grace's affairs were so pressing."

Suddenly Henry was serious. The laugh stopped, and he eyed Culpeper disconcertingly. This was a habit of his, a kingly habit, to stop his subjects from

presuming too far on a friendly mood. He said dryly, "And these affairs of mine were at Lee Hill and Penshurst, not so very far from Hampton Court. You never called once. You overstopped your leave by months. And this other affair, this purely personal one of your own, was at Holingborne, if I mistake not?"

"Your grace is right. I travelled on my own affairs for a month. I must crave your grace's mercy, and I wish to offer you this worthless life that you have given back to me out of your gracious clemency."

"What use is your life to me—particularly if it's so worthless?"

"Of none, at the moment. But I am always ready to surrender to you what is your own."

"You are a good boy, Tom." Henry leaned suddenly forward and caught Culpeper by the neck. "And an honest one, if all's truth. Do you think I'd let you die because the wench was fool enough not to love your pretty smile? But why did you kill the man, boy? That was foolish."

"I killed him, your grace, because he did not wear your livery yet presumed to capture me. I did not mean to kill him, only to beat him off."

"I'd do the same!" cried Will Sommers, "for mating-time is danger-time, eh, Tom? That's the one time a man mustn't be disturbed at his devotions. He should have waited. Marry, he must be no gentleman—he must have been the husband."

"Peace, Will." Henry smiled kindly at Culpeper. "Run to the dancers, lad," he said. "You're too young to stay up here with us. They're making ready for a galliard. Dance with your coz."

"With Her Grace?" said Culpeper, shocked and frightened. Why did he throw her into his arms like this? Was it a trap?

"Ay, lad, with your Queen, but even a Queen has

relations." Henry felt sorry for the young man, noting the drawn mouth, the lines on the young forehead. He had suffered for that stupid act of his. . . . Besides, he preferred Kate to dance with somebody he could trust, and preferably, with a relation: he knew that Culpeper reverenced him, and he was a good lad. "Run off, boy. . . ."

The great men around the King on the dais watched Culpeper go, indifferently. He was of no importance in the gigantic battle of politics, and none of them cared if he were disgraced or in favour. Only shrewd Will Sommers, the jester, with his shaven face and close-cropped black poll, watched Culpeper with curious, serious eyes.

"He has a pretty leg," he murmured softly, biting his thumb, "and if he'd waited for the wench in day instead of at night, I doubt if he'd have needed those eight hands to tame her."

But Henry was not listening.

It was a galliard, a sprightly galliard, a dance of jumps and hops and merriment. Every pavane has its galliard, said the Spaniards, every hour of sorrow is followed by laughter, all work by sport. A galliard, and the Queen for a partner to young Tom Culpeper. A Queen with large eyes, dark blue in this light, with turned-up nose and wide nostrils, with long throat, full, pouting lips, and rust-coloured soft hair under a pearl-bordered French hood of old gold colour, tied beneath the chin. She was dressed, as Paston had said, in French fashion; she did not like the Spanish clothes; that is to say, she liked more freedom for her body and scorned to cover throat and bosom with laps of stifling cloth. Her throat was uncovered but for the collar Henry had given her for New Year's gift that held sixteen diamonds like frozen light stabbing their colour on the quick flesh, ending in a

square edged with milky pearls about a shimmering muddle of yellow-white and red, thirty-three diamonds and sixty rubies. No prudish Spaniard there: her young breast gleamed behind the unbuttoned chemise.

"Thomas!" she cried as she took his hand, and her wet palm caressed his palm. Her large blue eyes, bright with merriment, gazed into his. "We've heard strange tales of you," she said, "tales of wicked men and stupid girls."

"Did you plead for me?" he asked quickly. He hadn't meant to say that. He had meant to be more distant, more the gentleman.

She answered *yes* with her eyes: so she had saved his neck. He withdrew his hand from hers just as the musicians burst into the jolly music. He fumbled inside his doublet a moment, awkwardly, then caught her hand again.

But now between their hot palms was something hard, something with sharpish corners that hurt Kate's skin. But she did not betray by look or gesture that aught was amiss. And Culpeper gazed steadily ahead, his face scarlet. He was glad that the dance was too quick for talking, glad indeed of the fourth step when he leaped high, missed a step in the air, and landed neatly on the floor to the sixth note.

Kate said nothing. She was unusually silent; for pressed between their palms was something hard that slowly yielded as the dance continued, became softer, sodden with their mingled sweat; something caged between her palm and Thomas's . . . what?

Only Tom Paston amongst the watchers knew what that something was, as he lounged against one of the sides of the screens; only Tom Paston and a bright-eyed jester who had been waiting fearfully for just such a move.

CHAPTER FOUR

King, Queen, and Pawn

IT WAS VERY LATE when Tom Culpeper awoke next morning. The household had been up for four hours, Mass had been solemnised, and breakfast eaten, when at about eight o'clock he rolled in his bed, parted the curtains, and glared at the windows bright with gentle sunlight. And with awakening, there rushed upon him the memory of last night, of the note slipped into Kate's hand. And he shuddered.

Had she shown it to Henry? No, she couldn't have, he'd have been in the Porter's Lodge now, manacled or in the stocks, if she had let Henry see it. Yet, one never knew. The King might be playing with him, waiting to catch him in some perilous situation. He would never risk such a thing again. And he would never drink again. He swore it.

If only he could get away, back to Holingborne, or be sent even to Richmond or Westminster to examine and make an inventory of the armour! There was no escaping Henry at Hampton Court, no escaping the feel of Kate's presence. But he must get it over, he must not be a coward and hide like this.

It needed courage to face Henry with this fear in his mind, but Culpeper never shirked danger: that was the penalty of being a coward. It was only when danger came upon him unexpectedly, when he had no time to stiffen his muscles or to consider what he faced, that he ran from it.

He shaved and dressed with the greatest care, although his servant had not yet arrived from Holing-

borne, and he had for the moment to do everything himself. Then he strode along the gallery and down the stairs into the Fountain Court, there under the Clock Tower he went, and up through the screens into the Great Hall.

Over the dais; then at the door in the centre that led into the Great Watching Chamber, Culpeper stood, taking deep breaths before he entered, while the waiters and yeomen watched him curiously.

Then he strode in.

Before the oriel window blazing with coloured glass—greens, reds, purples, and blues, Wolsey's colours and arms, Henry's colours and arms—sat the King on his chair, his sore leg resting on cushions. Culpeper stood at the far end, beside the sergeant-at-arms who stood erect with his halberd, unseen, while Henry talked with lean Mr. Secretary Wriothesley, Will Sommers teasing his monkey in one corner. Only Sommers saw Culpeper enter, and he gazed at him with his keen dark eyes that were sunken like a dying man's, but he did not stop his game.

The tapestried Triumphs on the walls shook as if alive. The needlework chariots and carts of Time, Renown, and Fate glittered with gold thread as the light fell upon them. Culpeper stared straight before him at Chastity attacked by the three Destinies, with Cupid bound at her feet; Lucrece was near by, gripping a long flagged staff in her left hand, the right hand feeling for the dagger held up by Bonvolonte. Suddenly, Culpeper realised what the figures signified, and a coldness gathered about his heart: there, the Triumph of Fate, and in the tapestry everybody was crushed by it, people were dying under the wheels, struck down by javelins, while Lucrece opened her numbed fingers for the knife; Cupid was bound at the feet of Chastity. These tapestries had belonged to Wolsey, that great Cardinal,

and Fate, in the body of a waspish woman, Anne Boleyn, had struck him down; he had poisoned himself, it was said, but those dull-belled oxen there had killed him, striding on they knew not why nor whereto, trampling the blood from humanity with insensate hoofs: oxen dragging the Fates along, and Atropos enthroned, her right hand fondling a skull, Wolsey's skull? . . .

"Your new jester waits his master's nod," said Sommers over his shoulder, and Henry glanced up quickly at the slim figure at the door. Then he smiled and nodded for him to approach.

"You're up late, Tom," he said. "Tired after your journey?"

Culpeper came forward stiffly and fell on one knee before his King.

"Yes, your grace," he said, "tired after my journey, but tired more in mind than in body."

"Poor lad, does it rankle so? Look, Wriothesley, here's some one in Court who has a conscience; cherish the lad as you love me."

Wriothesley bowed and glanced darkly at Culpeper, saying, "Whom your grace loves becomes my son. I will remember Mr. Culpeper." He did not know the youth well; what prejudices had he? which side was he on? He must find out.

"By my fai'," cried Will Sommers, "I must to the woods and find a wench, and as my pet monk has four hands and a tail he'll do as well as two and a half of the four men."

Henry turned to hear what jest was coming, and seeing that his master watched, Sommers continued softly as if to himself: "For it seems to me, friend monk, that to have a conscience in this Court you must first sin to make it rankle. We will tumble the most virtuous kitchen-maid, and thus become favourite with our lord and master."

But this was a jest that Henry did not laugh at.

"You presume too far, man," he said fiercely. Then he leaned his hand on Culpeper's head. "You and I will walk together—alone," he added, swinging on the other two. "My staff, monkey!"

Sommers picked up the tall, jewelled staff from the window and passed it to the King, who rose awkwardly, his face twitching with the pain. He flung one arm around Culpeper's neck, and gripping the staff with his other hand, they hobbled off.

Sommers did not speak until they had reached the door, then he leaned over Wriothesley's shoulder and whispered: "Let's find two Lucreces, Mr. Secretary; let them be plump, but never queenly. That lad knows how to sneak into favour. And by the Mass, he's as good a Catholic as my Lord Norfolk—or Queen Kate!"

"A Catholic? He is a Catholic?"

But Sommers would say no more. He swung the monkey on to his shoulder and darted off on four legs, yo-hooing and shouting hunting cries.

Wriothesley was alone in the Great Watching Chamber, save for the sergeant-at-arms near the door; he held dispatches in one hand, but he crumpled them, his brow heavy with thought.

Wriothesley did not like the Howards. For Wriothesley came from common blood, as his master Cromwell had come, and as Cromwell's master Wolsey, too, had come. He did not feel at ease with such noblemen as proud Norfolk.

In the King's Privy Garden, cold and flowerless as it was, Culpeper walked beside his master. There was nothing effeminate about Henry; only the pain in his leg kept him indoors, and he walked in all weathers; but nowadays, although he was not yet quite fifty, walking was very difficult, owing to a fall from his

horse in 1536 while jousting. He had lain for two hours afterwards without speaking, in terrible torment, while the surgeons probed for broken bones and washed the skin. He had had heavy purple veins on his legs, and these had been broken by the weight of horse and armour; they had never closed up properly since, and quite recently the pain had been so frightful that he had been unable to leave his bed all day. A powerful athlete, with the passing of sport his splendid body had loosened and grown fat, but he did not look unwieldy, for he was very tall, well over six feet three.

"Tell me truly, Tom," he said, "why did you do it?"

Culpeper bit his lip and gazed up at the heavy sky.

"Truly, your grace," he said, "I cannot tell you. I didn't know that I had such vile impulses in me. I have taken my full penance from the Church, but even now my conscience will not quieten. I confess that I had been drinking, but now I have taken an oath before Our Lord never to let the stuff burn my throat again. I had been drinking, and we met her in a small grotto in the wood, I and four of my men. The moon made her look more beautiful than she was. And I was mad. Ah, your grace, you in your goodness and wisdom, I cannot expect you to understand the weak sins of us simple men, but you have the kindness to forgive them."

"I understand, Tom, I understand. There is something in women that unrasps even kings." He was thinking of Anne Bolcyn, and the noble heads of Fisher and More that he had given her, as Herod had given John's head to the strumpet Salome. "God will understand," he murmured, "for did he not place our ribs in the bodies of our sisters? You should marry, lad. I'll look out for a wife for you, some gentle girl, plump as a partridge and as true as a pelican."

It was on Culpeper's tongue to refuse the offer, but he remembered that one cannot refuse the gifts of kings, and was silent. But Henry had noticed the frightened look in the youth's eyes and he was in a tender mood to-day : he was so happy with his Kate that he wanted all men to be happy.

"You flinch from the thought," he said. "I am your friend, Tom, as well as your King. And I tell you that all I have learned on earth is that peace can be found only in a good woman's arms. Didn't great Solomon realise that that was the ultimate truth, for all his wisdom? Marry some young chick and have babes to carry on your name, peace by the firelight in the evening, and let your armour rust and the wine turn sour. That's all life's happiness. It's taken me years to know it, but all my life I have been searching for it."

In their walk, they had strolled to the rear of the palace, and now turned the corner into the park. To their left ran the windows of the Queen's lodgings, curved windows of jalousied glass suddenly ending in the great windows of her gallery.

Both men gazed up, Henry with tenderness, and Culpeper with fear.

But they caught no glimpse of any woman.

Yet behind the glass a woman watched them, a tall, dark woman with heavy eyes, a hawkish nose, and protruding lower-lip : Lady Jane Rochford, the widow of George Boleyn, Lady of the Queen's Privy Chamber. She beckoned to one of the chamberers who was laying rushes, a pert, tow-headed wench called Lovekin.

"Will you tell Her Grace that the King walks in the park," said Lady Jane, "and that I am here, in the gallery?"

The girl courtesied, and as Lady Jane did not turn,

she wrinkled her nose spitefully at her back, and made off. Lady Jane did not turn until she heard the Queen's step behind her, then felt her hot breath on her cheek.

"What is it?" came the whisper.

"Don't let them see you. Peep through the hangings."

Kate's face, flushed from the firelight, was next to Lady Jane's; she still held some cloth in her hand that she had been sewing, and her hair had come untwisted from the red cap, a wisp falling down and tickling Lady Jane's sharp nose. Kate peered out of the window and Lady Jane peered at Kate; then she felt Kate's warm hand fumbling for hers, felt the moist palm pressed tightly on her cold palm.

"It is fate," whispered the Queen in awe-struck tones. "Who can withstand fate?" and she pressed her friend's hand so tightly that she hurt.

"Is he not handsome?" she whispered.

"As a saint," said Lady Jane.

But they did not say to which man they referred.

DULL Hampton Court. Oh, to escape, to run to London and drink in taverns; oh, to be alone before one's own fireside and not always to be listening for the breathing of spies behind the arras, for following footsteps! Tom Culpeper had no real task to do at Court, and his days were spent in idleness. He did not wait upon the Queen and join her dances, he dared not see her lest she smile upon him and he do something desperate and foolish. With his friend, Paston, he played tennis and went hawking, but neither mentioned the name of Kate: shiftily, they avoided it.

He listened to the gossip, but did not join in with it. Once Wriothesley stopped him in the Fountain Court and talked kindlily to him, but Culpeper did

not like the man, and showed his feelings ; Sommers did not speak to him once, but Culpeper saw him always watching him, slyly.

The King had stopped many old customs, and the custom in particular that Culpeper blessed him for stopping was dining in state in the Great Hall. This would have been torment to him, to eat in the same room as the Queen and to feel her eyes upon him. But just as Henry had dispensed with the elaborate ceremony of bed-making, except on important occasions like a marriage, so had he split up the meals into so many messes, eaten in companies of four and six.

The palace of Hampton Court was run easily and with the minimum of expense. Many old offices were abolished, and efforts made to keep the servants honest and the kitchen-boys clean and apparelled. The Board of Greencloth met often, usually once a week, and expenses for the next week were drawn up under the hand of the Cofferer, Edmund Pekham ; there was no waste, every oat and rush was accounted for.

But in this, Culpeper did not fit. He was an idler, except when at Greenwich or when he waited personally on the King, helping him dress, but during his absence that post had been filled by another man.

So the winter passed, and Spring came to the King's Privy Garden, bursting the knot gardens into buds of yellow and red and blue amongst the box and thyme. Birds sang at Hampton Court ; first the swallows came, and the merry cuckoos, then the martins were building their little huts against the roof, and the nightingale began to practise her full-throated glorious song. Spring at Hampton Court ; the maids gazed out of windows and prinked themselves before the looking-glass ; and everybody seemed jollier, dressed in their brightest clothes, as they watched the sunlight battle with the Winter and, through the stained-glass windows,

glitter its colour like great translucent petals on the walls.

Fate's chariot remained unmoving, the belled oxen were motionless on that tapestry in the King's Great Watching Chamber; then slowly Fate moved. Fate started the dull wheels going, and Lucrece was to be offered the knife; Cupid was for a moment to be unbound. . . .

The King was going to York . . . and the Fates were ready to ride with him . . . so was Lucrece and Cupid. Only Tarquin was unprepared.

CHAPTER FIVE

The King shows Humility

BUT FIRST, an interlude, the 8th of April 1541, Maundy Thursday, at Greenwich. The King washes the feet of his subjects.

And in the Queen's Gallery, Queen Kate sat with her dearest friend, Lady Jane Rochford. They sat apart from the other ladies and gentlewomen, whispered secretly into each other's caps, eyes bright, mouths parted and wet. It was a day of sunlight so delicate that it scarcely pierced the window-glass but glowed there in soft gold and flakes of silver. Outside, the trees were putting forth their little buds, their great bodies twisted and stiff as if tense in the gigantic effort of growth. The creeper had burst out against the brick walls and rippled with yellow-green leaves along the brown stalks. The daffodils opened yellow eyes in the gardens, and birds were beginning to nest and pipe in the eaves. It was Spring, the sun was gradually thawing earth and flesh, the green was growing on the ground and dying in the hearts of maids. There was such promise in the heady air, the sky was so tender in its opalescent blue, the clouds so soft and friendly . . . all the world seemed friendly. . . .

The ladies and maids-in-waiting felt this friendliness, and in their hearts was a yearning to be out in the woods a-maying. They picked the strings of cittern and psaltery, slid their fingers over virginal keys, their eyes misty with longing and dreams. They talked apart in groups, whispering; there was no

dancing now, no riotous spirits, no dressing-up in boys' clothes and in the transparent drapery of Greek goddesses. They sat or stood in groups, and the Queen with Lady Jane sat in a corner on cushions, side by side. None could hear them, except Kate's cat, a great red brute with deep blue eyes who lived on sweets and goat's milk, and who was too lazy even to claw or bite.

"She was not so beautiful as you," said Lady Jane, "her chin was long and sagged plumply to her throat, that had a little goitre that she always hid, and she had a mouth small as that cat's, but fuller. Only her eyes were very beautiful, and her hair, but her upper-lip was long and heavily ridged, and her nose was sharpish. But she was innocent, except perhaps for Mark Smeaton. I was never sure about Mark, a creeping toady. Just the type she would have chosen, because she could have bullied him and shown off to him and played the man. He swore to his death that he was guilty, but that means little. But the others, Weston, Norris, and George, were innocent. I know. No matter what happened before marriage, she was true afterwards, save for Smeaton. I was with her in the Tower. 'I have a little neck,' she said, lifting her plaits, and laughed. It wasn't bravery. She trembled at every step. She didn't know what to do—so she laughed."

"But if she was innocent . . . ?"

"Innocent of that, perhaps, but Nan Bullen suffered for a different thing. If the Lady Elizabeth had grown a beard it would have been different."

"She couldn't help it being a girl."

"My sweet child, you must know that a Queen without a son is as useful to a King as a falcon without its beak. George told her often. George, I mean my husband, whom God forgive. That was why she took Mark. In court, when the writing that was too

dreadful to be spoken was passed from hand to hand, and George was asked if he had spoken such treason, he smiled and read aloud for all the world to hear : 'Did I say this?' said he, 'that the King can't have relations with his wife? that there's no potency or virtue in him?' And there he put his tongue upon what all Queens must suffer."

"And I? But he loves me! Look at all he's given me. You can see he loves me."

"He loved Nan Bullen, too. Loved her enough to trade the Pope for her kisses. God save me from speaking treason, but like that cat there, he has claws in his fingers."

"And you think . . .?" Poor Kate! Mouth parted, curled back fearfully from those littlest teeth, eyes open appealingly.

But Lady Jane was remorseless. "Even you, honey," she murmured, "without a son . . ."

There was a noise outside, they heard the clatter of arms, the scurry of feet in the chambers. Mrs. Cowpledike, maid-of-honour, darted breathlessly through the door.

"Here comes the King! the King!"

A fluttering on every side, hair smoothed back under hats and hoods, lips pinched to make them red, eyes blinked to make them dewy, sleeves puffed out, veils thrown back, skirts twisted to flow in prettier folds back from the rich underskirts, bodices loosened, collars smoothed, the linen chemise tucked down a little. Kate was on her feet, Lady Jane standing apart from her.

The King, the King heralded by pages and gentlemen ushers, all bowing as the great man hobbled into the gallery, leaning on his tall stick, breathing heavily, mouth set tightly to stop any cry of pain. The King in scarlet, the round Order of the Garter with its red cross on his left shoulder, little round velvet cap

with the ostrich-plume on his bald head; blinking, the fat cheeks quivering, the King came into the gallery; and like swans bending to the water, all the ladies folded their legs in the long skirts, bowing their lovely heads; flowers falling before the mighty wind, leaning their heads towards the rushes.

"Can you see Charles?" one lady whispers from the corner of her mouth. . . . "I can see Dick's legs, I'd know them in a million," whispers the one next to her, and adds, "Who wears green garters?" . . . "That's Charles," murmurs the other excitedly, "I gave them to him." . . . "Oh, naughty jade, oh, naughty . . ."

The King comes down the gallery, they see his large stiff legs in scarlet stockings, the slashed red slippers, the flat end of his jewelled oak staff; and as he passes, the ladies rise, one after the other, as if the wind had veered and swung them back: and they seek for loved eyes amongst the gentlemen, their faces flushed with stooping.

The King stopped before his Queen, and waited until she rose from her courtesy, a wisp of rust-coloured hair fallen from the cap across her forehead.

"Is that all your greeting?" asked the King kindlily.

"It is the way I have been taught to greet my lord," she answered demurely.

"And your husband? how do you greet your husband?"

Shyly, eyes bold yet embarrassed, gazing slinkingly on each side, and with a laugh catching in her throat, she put her arm around his neck and dragged his head down to her kiss. She had to jump to reach him, she was so little and he so tall.

"That's better." He laughed and fondled her throat. He could not keep his hands off her: everybody noticed it; the foreign Ambassadors even chuckled about it in their reports.

"We start very soon," he said, "in a month or two. You've made me happy, sweet little wolf."

He could not tell her how happy she had made him; no woman before had ever made him so happy, except, perhaps, Jane. She was what he had been seeking all his life—young and beautiful and pure and trusting. Her blue eyes had the undisturbed serenity of innocence, the secretive shyness of innocence, changing their colour with her moods: now blue, now grey, now even almost golden; they hid, it seemed to him, a dainty world that no man could enter with his clumsy love-making, a world of childish unreality. He wanted to protect this world of hers, to keep her unbruised and fresh and childlike. This was the first really childlike woman he had known, except, perhaps, Jane Seymour; but Jane, darling as she had been before God chose her, had more the placidity of ignorance than of innocence, she had been undisturbed and undisturbing, with her white face and large, expressionless eyes. This Kate was a mixture of Jane and Anne Boleyn: she had Jane's simplicity and Anne's vitality. She was the perfect woman. All his life he had longed for the perfect woman, one for him to protect and one who would protect him. And he had had Katharine palmed off on to him, that stubborn, cow-faced Spaniard . . .

To the devil with such memories!

"To-day I wash my people's feet," he smiled. "And I will be thinking always of my little pigesnie's feet. Love, you have eyes just like your cat's! See!" He leaned down suddenly and caught her cat by the back of the neck and swung it up beside her. The cat did not object: with the insolence of beauty, it allowed them to admire it without protest, and gazed with large, drowsy eyes at the King. "See, blue like yours! And it has red hair, too! Just like Kate's! But my Kate has the prettier paws, there

are no long nails hidden there, little rose without a thorn."

But she was thinking all the while of Anne Boleyn, and of Lady Jane's warning, and with sudden determination she lied; she said, "Harry," and paused. She gazed uneasily around, then led him farther from the others and whispered quickly, her breath tickling his large, hairy ear: "Harry, I shouldn't speak yet. I'm not sure, but I think . . . you know . . ."

She felt his whole body stiffen, saw his golden eyes set hard, unbelieving, the little mouth closed; he gazed at her, afraid to understand.

"Don't make it harder for me." She pressed closer, gazed up pleadingly. "I've hadn't time to make sure—a day—but perhaps God has blessed us. . . . Oh, Christ, dear, say something!"

"I daren't," he whispered hoarsely. "Surely God couldn't be so kind!"

"I've prayed night and day. I hope . . . Pray with me, Harry!"

The blood flowed back into his heavy cheeks, the eyes brightened. So often had he been cheated, but now that he had found the right woman, perhaps the miracle had taken place? perhaps the perfection of their love flowed to so true a rhythm that the trinity was inevitable? There is profound mystery in gestation and in conceiving; it is no mere physical thing; the minds must be fluid, must be one, before fruition takes place. The others—save Jane—had not been the right woman for him. Of course, Kate always had reminded him of Jane!

The blood flowed quicker, his heart seemed a separate creature in his chest, pounding with excitement. He drew himself up to all his six feet three-odd inches, his great chest out.

"My love!" he cried, eyes bright as glass, "if it be true, I'll have you crowned as no Queen has ever

been crowned. I'll have you crowned at Whitsuntide and the whole world'll bow to you. We'll have such jousts and tournaments, such feasting. . . . My God, Kate, we'll make it ring down the centuries. The Cloth of Gold will be tawdry beside our celebrations!"

He seemed a man inspired. He dared not believe the miracle lest disillusion come upon him. He had one son, Edward, Jane's boy, but Edward was a sickly lad, and a second son would leave his inheritance Tudor beyond dispute.

With a new tenderness, almost a reverence, he kissed her between the eyes.

"You must take great care of yourself, little wolf," he whispered.

From mouth to mouth the news spread about the palace. How does such news travel? The King told Mr. Secretary, and Mr. Secretary mentioned it to the Lord High Chamberlain, and the Lord High Chamberlain spoke to the Master of the Horse, and the Master of the Horse to the Duke of Norfolk, and the Duke of Norfolk to . . .

Never mind: the news was all around Greenwich within an hour, it had sailed to Hampton Court, it was in London; Charles de Marillac, the French Ambassador, raised his bored eyebrows; Eustace Chapuys, the Spanish Ambassador, merely chuckled in his tired, thin throat: he had heard that kind of story before, often.

The servants in the Great Hall arranging the Maundy ceremony, grinned behind their hands; Tom Paston sought out Culpeper.

"You must get me the finest armour you can steal," he cried. "What's the good of having a friend in the Armoury unless he steals me pretty pieces? I'll snap a lance with you, my cock, and break the back of your saddle. I love a joust!"

Culpeper was in his chamber, lying on his bed, with the curtains open, and he smiled palely at his friend's enthusiasm. A joust! He hated the things. He suffered hell waiting for his turn in the lists.

"What's all the fuss about?" he asked. "Is the King marrying again, or what?"

"Nay, lad!" cried Paston, "but the Queen's to have a little Tudor cub . . ."

Then he stopped, and they gazed at each other, suddenly realising the brink on which they stood. It was the first time they had mentioned Kate since that night of the dance, months ago.

Culpeper did not flinch. He said in a careless voice: And we are to break our necks to baptize it in blood? I'll do my best to steal you some nice pieces."

"The prettiest pieces," said Paston awkwardly.

Both felt ill at ease, as if a barrier was between them.

In the Great Hall low tables were set, a table on each side of the length of the Hall, and on these tables forms were laid. On the tables and under the forms were spread rich carpets and plump cushions; and at the upper end of the Hall, on the dais, was put another table, this one for the Archbishop of Canterbury to stand on, and before it was a stool with cushions for the King's knees. Thus was the Hall arranged for the ceremony when the King, in imitation of Our Lord, humbled himself and, for a day, knelt before the lowliest of his subjects.

Forty-nine of these subjects now waited outside, bullied by the men-at-arms and fidgeting with their polished leather coats, in terror. The Holy Water basins and the alms—piles of clothing, pieces of cloth, and forty-nine purses containing forty-nine pence each—were brought and laid on one side of the

tables. Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, in violet, entered with his acolytes, his deacons and sub-deacons, his choir and singing-boys, preceded by his chaplain bearing the jewelled cross-staff, Cranmer keeping his gaze fixed upon the image of Our Lord embossed upon it. They took their places on the dais before the altar hastily erected there. Then hobbled in the miserable poor folk, who scrambled ungracefully on to the forms, rubbed their cold noses—for they were far from the fire that was in the middle of the Hall—twitched their naked feet and did not know what to do with their hands.

The Yeomen of the Laundry in clean green doublets, gold chains about their necks, the golden Tudor Rose embroidered on their backs, entered carrying basins and towels. Hurriedly, they washed the poor folk's feet, rubbed them dry with the towels, kissed their own thumb-nails, made the sign of the cross, and hurried off so that the Sub-Almoner could do as they had done; after the Sub-Almoner had finished washing and kissing the feet, the Great Almoner himself did the same; until the wretched poor folk feared that they would have no feet left, their skin stung so with the pummelling and the hot water.

Trumpets were blown from above the screens as the King, His Gracious Highness, entered, smiling his merry smile, leaning on his staff, his gentlemen behind him; his gay little eyes roved from frightened poor man to man, and he sighed as he counted forty-nine of them, one for each year that had passed him by. He would be fifty in June, just two months off. He walked on, his staff thumping on the boards, crushing the fresh-cut green leaves, until he reached the dais and, making the sign of the cross, knelt there on the cushions before the violet Archbishop.

He did not listen to Cranmer's quiet, rich voice, nor to the thrush-tones of the boys; he was thinking

of a girl's blue eyes and of a God who was suddenly good to an ageing man. After all these years, God was kind. He did not doubt that it was because Kate was the right woman for him, just as Jane Seymour had been—never for a moment did he think she had lied to him; he only feared that in her innocence she might be mistaken.

The other wives had not been built for him. First, that broad-hipped, slow-moving, big-chinned Katharine from Aragon, his brother's wife. Six years older than Henry she had been; he was only eighteen when he married her, obedient to his father's last wish. She was twenty-four, then. What did a boy of eighteen know of love and peace and real happiness? All he cared for then was to learn from good books under the tutorship of the poet Skelton, and to train his young body in hard sports. When he took her to the altar, his dead brother's wife, that brother, Arthur, must have stood jealously behind him. She was Arthur's wife, and not even a dispensation from the Pope could wipe away that fact. It was written in the Bible, in Leviticus: "If a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing. He hath uncovered his brother's nakedness. They shall be childless." And so it had proved, miscarriage after miscarriage, only the Princess Mary had lived, a girl. And Henry had grown frightened to see the hand of God thus proved in life, dead child after dead child. He had uncovered his brother's nakedness. Nobody now would ever know if she had been Arthur's wife in fact; they had been bedded, and it was sworn that in the morning Arthur had cried: "Give me a cup of ale, for I have been this night in the midst of Spain! Masters, it is good pastime to have a wife!" All Henry knew was that he had no proof that she came to him without the stain of another's embraces; if it had not been Arthur, there was that sly priest,

the rough-mouthed tatterdemalion of a Fray Diego Fernandez who, during her early widowhood, had ordered her about and insulted her as only a lover would be permitted to, his behaviour becoming so scandalous that even her Spanish friends were forced to protest and have the rascal sent away. Eventually he was convicted of adultery. If not Arthur, it had been Fray Diego, and that made Henry even more angry.

He had never loved the woman, and seeing the constant death of his hopes as God struck the children even before they saw the world, he had grown frightened, so that when Anne Boleyn caught him with her witchcraft, he was easy prey. He had loved Anne's sister, Mary, but she was spiritless, while Anne was too spirited. Under her kisses he had bargained away the Pope, had killed those noble, honest men, Fisher and More, destroyed great Wolsey and divorced his Queen, and even been cruel to his own patient daughter, Princess Mary. Quick-tempered, vindictive, sharp-tongued as Anne was, he began to loathe her; and when Cromwell laid before him proofs of her adultery he had not been unhappy at her death.

He doubted if she had been guilty. Nevertheless, she deserved to die. She had laid witchcraft on him. He, who had always wanted peace and a merry home-life, had first been cursed with a stupid, humourless creature who walked like a mule, waddling from side to side, as if she had no legs under her skirt and had to swing herself along; then he had been bewitched by shrewish Anne Bullen—Boleyn, as she called herself. Never had he found peace until, from Anne, he turned to quiet Jane Seymour with the tight little mouth and with a complexion as snowy and as tender to touch as growing lilies. Little Jane Seymour! With her he had had a snatch of happiness before she died in bringing young Edward to the Tudor throne. He remembered Jane with tenderness; they

would have been always happy if God had not chosen otherwise. Then Cromwell had bullied him into marrying that coarse Flemish creature, Anne of Cleves; they had lied to him about her; Hans Holbein had painted a lying, lovely picture of her, and he had been speechless when at last she came to England and he saw her with his own eyes. His great desire for a contented home-life made him shudder from grossness: he wanted a charming, simple wife, one who was young and pure and beautiful. And he had never found her until now with Kate. Men called him carnal, but he was no more carnal than others, less than most. Mere lust could be satisfied without marriage, especially by a King with lovely women on all sides wilting to be honoured even with a night's embrace. He did not want just that; he dreamed inarticulate dreams of cosy, fire-lit rooms with children romping at his feet, boys fighting mimic tournaments on stool-back, and his sweet young wife at his knees, listening and trusting and admiring.

And that at last he had got, with Kate Howard—sweet, innocent Kate Howard. . . .

He did not realise that the service was over and that Cranmer had finished reading the Gospel that told of the meek Christ washing His disciples' feet; he heard the steps of the gentlemen in the Hall, bringing him aprons and towels, and he looked slowly round. Then, leaning on a scarlet-coated page's shoulder, he heaved himself upright, smiling mechanically. Dull as this yearly ceremony was, he attempted to do everything with a smile. It made such a good impression.

Wriggling with embarrassment, not knowing where to look, fists clenched, eyes shut, the poor folk felt the King's revered fingers on their scaly feet, washing them carelessly from the basin of warm water on the surface of which floated the stalkless faces of bright-coloured flowers.

"You were a fool! Nan Bullen tried that trick! It only angered him the more when he found out. When he knows you tricked him . . . You little idiot! Why didn't you warn me what you were going to do?"

Queen Kate pressed her wet hands together and gazed fearfully around her. They were at the very end of the gallery, far from the other women, yet she was afraid they might overhear; but only the cat, stretched luxuriously on the cushions, watched them with half-shut, sleepy eyes.

"I was so frightened, I didn't know what to do. . . ."

"Let me think! Let me think!" Lady Jane pressed her palms on her cheeks, dragging down the corners of her eyes. "You can't move an inch without being watched," she groaned. "You could say you're ill and want to be alone except for me, and need fresh air . . . perhaps."

"I can't go to bed without being helped in; they sleep outside my door, and they even try to sleep with me; if I stir in the night some one cries: 'Are you awake, your grace?' Oh, who'd be a Queen? Spies everywhere!"

"Young Roger Cotes adores you."

"A menial!"

"I saw him bend over your footprint in the garden and stroke it with his fingers. He kissed the rim of your cup where you'd drunk from it. He'd die for you, and he'd be silent!"

"What are you talking of? a serving-man?"

"Anne took Mark Smeaton. . . . He was with your great-aunt, the Duchess of Norfolk, wasn't he? We could use him for messages if you're so fastidious."

Kate caught her breath and swung round, with happiness showing in her eyes. "But where can we meet?" she cried.

"In the progress, easily: there's always muddle in a progress."

"But that's not till July or August, and this is April! We must do something—now!" She walked over to the windows and gazed out at the fields that were slowly breaking into greenery. "If only I was a bird," she said, "or a milkmaid. Why was I fool enough to make myself a Queen? I didn't know that you were spied on like this from every side!"

"This gallery is not so very high," mused Lady Jane, "and that creeper looks strong. Wait here; I'll see Roger Cotes."

"What are you going to do?"

"Wait," said Lady Jane.

Queen Kate pressed her hot cheek against the icy glass and watched the breath turn to liquid before her mouth. To be a Queen! She had had such stupid dreams! She had not realised that Queenship would not change her carnal soul. Somehow she had felt that with rich clothes and jewellery, her character would change; it hadn't: she was the same Kate Howard, only now she was dressed in unfamiliar garments and made to act an unfamiliar part, a part that most decidedly did not suit her.

When the ceremony was over in the Great Hall, it was dusk, and Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, a stolid, dark little man who never looked you in the face, except shyly, walked behind his chaplain to his own apartments. At the door he dismissed the man, and walked in alone, carefully shutting the door behind him.

As he entered, a lean figure rose suddenly from the other side of the table and blinked suspiciously.

"It's I," said Cranmer in quite an unusual voice, a harsh voice. "Sit down, you fool!" Tenderly, he took off his jewelled Mitre and laid it on a carved oak chest. "Have you seen Mr. Wriothesley?"

"I saw Mr. Secretary half an hour ago, during the

Popish affair in the Hall. He had nothing to tell me, no orders to give. That Popish mummery, it's blasphemy, that's what I call it." He sat down slowly again on the stool and gazed impertinently at the Archbishop. He was dressed in dark brown fustian of a most sober cut, with black collar drawn up to his bearded chin, the sleeves very straight, the breeches slim, and the stockings of coarse wool ; his hat was a small felt affair, shapeless from having been too often in the rain, then dried too hurriedly before the fire : it rippled and fell like a cabbage-leaf all around his dark, close-cropped skull. His nose was broken, the eyes dark and slanting. He watched the Archbishop without a blink, with the supercilious stare of the fanatic who has a purpose in life.

"Nothing new to report to me?" asked the Archbishop.

"Nothing new, your grace. Howard still boasts of his Popery before every one. I told ye, didn't I, that he shouted out once that he'd never read the Scriptures nor ever would, and that it was merry in England before this New Learning came up?"

"I know all that, you've told me that ten times, twenty times. It's old, old. That was just before poor Cromwell fell at the will of this carnal Norfolk. Be careful, Lascelles, keep your tongue quieter, or one day you'll be burnt."

Cranmer sat down and tapped his plump fingers on the table. He was an intelligent-looking man, yet gross, with a peculiar mixture of alertness and stupidity in his light eyes. He despised this fanatic of a Lascelles, and loathed himself for using such a tool, but he was hard pressed and growing desperate.

"Nothing better to tell me than that?" he sighed. "You don't earn your pay, Lascelles."

Lascelles leaned forward, glanced from side to side, and whispered : "D'ye know that the Catholic bond

isn't as strong as they think? All chains are as strong as the weakest link, remember."

"Which is the weakest link?"

"Wherever a woman joins the chain, that link is weak. Turmoils are bred; lust quarrels with ambition. It is a wicked, sinful world, your grace, and we have much to fight before the Good Work conquers, and Antichrist's no more."

But Cranmer was not listening. Gone now was the look of stupidity from mouth and eyes; his mouth was open in half a smile, half a glare of surprise. He was suddenly seeing beyond the tapestries on the wall, down the vista of time.

"By God, Lascelles, you have it there!" he cried. "And now that Winchester's away . . . What is Norfolk doing?"

"Norfolk does what he has always done. He'll never learn, that man. He thinks that women like a brutal hand on the backs of their necks, he screws their pretty noses down until they bleed with rage. He's quarrelled with the Dowager."

Now, definitely, did Cranmer smile. "Ah," he murmured, "with his stepmother?"

"Yes, with his stepmother, in whose home a certain exalted cat was bred. I have a sister, Mary—a godly name—who was chamberer there. The cat has taken sides with the big cat, and the dog is hated by both."

"Stop this parabling, there's no one listening. You either become too outspoken or too obscure. So the Queen and Norfolk aren't friends? Where is this sister of yours? Who is she?"

"She is far away, in Sussex, married to a godly man by the name of Hall. Will I see her? She told me terrible tales of this wench's gaddings and frippery."

"There is no hurry. We'll see how Norfolk twists. But this woman, Hall, is worth remembering. Have you mentioned her to Mr. Secretary?"

"Mr. Secretary is not my master."

"We'll leave things for a while, and wait. I've always found that waiting wins in the end. You've done well, Lascelles, for once in your life."

"Anything that helps the Good Work," said Lascelles with a smug grin. Then he leaned forward, head cocked on one side. "My sister, Mary—Mary Hall," he said softly, "has a woman's tongue, and I remember once she said to me—a woman's tongue, remember—but she said, talking of a certain red-headed cat, that she would come to naught if she kept on as she did, playing at naught. I, of course, being godly in my ways, although still sinful in the sight of Christ, I gently reproved her for her treason, but it bites like a rat at my conscience: such carnal things should not be hidden, the sinner should taste the whip on earth before he—or she—is tumbled into hell."

"After the progress," muttered Cranmer, "the King must go North and strike fear into those rebel hearts. When he returns, we'll see what proud-gutted Norfolk has to say to this Mary Hall."

"My sister," said Lascelles proudly. "Until the progress is over then? And must I wait all that while until my coat gets patched and my stocking darned?"

"You'll be paid all right, you'll be paid," said Cranmer irritably, unbuttoning with one hand the fringed embroidered maniple on his left wrist. "Now, leave me. And keep your wide mouth shut if you value your head."

Tom Culpeper was in the Armoury, going through a list of weapons and steel plates in preparation for the tournament that was to take place, if rumour spoke true about the state of the Queen. He did not like to think about it, and therefore busied himself in an effort to forget. He was in the accompting-room, surrounded by suits of armour piled high in their

leather and wooden cases shaped to fit the metal. There were heaps of chain-mail, plates of the old form of cuirass, the lower plate pointed higher than the upper; the newer cuirass in its stages of evolution —the ridge in the centre growing sharper and more obtuse—heavily quilted or lined with canvas or leather, growing heavier, more proven, to withstand the fire of arquebus and musket. Odd pauldrons for the shoulders, vambraces for the arms and elbows, gorgets or collars, old paunces for the skirt, ancient broad-toed sabatons now growing in shape more like ordinary shoes—he was surrounded by armour—blue and russet, some shining newly polished, some burnished, others raised in white on black, or inlaid with gold and silver, some of the pieces painted a uniform deep black—these for sailors, so that the sea-air and water would not tarnish them—here were helmets of every shape and size and age: the old-fashioned, formless, wide-brimmed salet, the airy burgonet, the stifling close-helmets for the joust, sparrow-beaked helms for men-at-arms; gauntlets, greaves for the calves and shins, the cuish for the thigh, knee-cop for the knee, sabatons for the feet, the buffe split for the air to enter on the hot face . . . metal of all shapes, bewildering to the uninitiated, but each piece essential when joined to another piece. Not only armour, but every kind of weapon was piled in that room: swords, darts, pole-axes, hand-axes, battle-axes, horsemen's hammers, double-headed javelins for in-fighting, maces, three-barrelled spiked clubs ironically called "Holy Water Sprinklers," pikes, spears, lances, arquebuses, muskets, bills, bows and arrows, daggers, partisans, halberds—some shining nakedly, others with blades hidden in their leather scabbards. . . . Culpeper was in a cave of steel, and the candlelight was reflected in quivering colour from all sides.

He was seeking for something to set aside for Paz, and wondering what he could use himself. It was a great honour indeed to have your plates hammered by the Greenwich armourers, but the King was kind to young men and often lent them some of his treasures. Like the great Maximilian, now dead, Henry had a passion for steel, an artistic passion. He grew fiery when he talked of the lovely curves of a plate, of the sweeping design of a burgonet. Nothing could stir him like armour-talk, and he had invented many trifles himself, various accessories for the joust, and had once nearly killed himself with one of his own inventions that proved faulty at the wrong moment. In particular, he had constructed a secret vambrace for the heavy, two-handed sword, an improvement on the old locking gauntlet that fixed your fingers to your wrist, and made a man unconquerable in a fight.

It was therefore an honour indeed to hold such a post as Culpeper's, that of Clerk of the Armoury.

As he sat at the table, sorting, selecting, the red firelight blazing on the steel, he found a page standing suddenly beside him.

"A yeoman to see you, sir," said the page. "From Her Highness the Queen."

"The Queen!" Culpeper sat up stiffly on his gilt stool and his hand shook as he laid down the steel beaver he had been examining for rust. "What can the Queen want with me?"

"Something about armour, sir. The man bears a message from his grace, too."

Culpeper did not speak again; already he had said too much, and he beckoned for the man to be brought in. It was Roger Cotes, whom he knew quite well: a young man who had been in service to the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk and who had followed in Kate's train to Court. He was a tall, powerful youth with bright yellow beard and large blue eyes. He stood

now stiffly before Culpeper, waiting to be spoken to, his hands at his sides; he was dressed in green and white, the King's livery.

"Well, man, what is it?"

Cotes held out a sheet of paper folded and sealed with the Queen's arms. It was a curt request for the loan of some armour for a frolic among the women, a mimic tournament, and with it was a note from the King endorsing the command.

"I think," said Cotes in a harsh, nervous voice, "that there is a further message on the other side. At least, so I was told."

Culpeper had been about to impale the note on a dagger, but at this, he took it up again and read what was scribbled on the other side of the Queen's message.

At first he could not understand the letters, then he swung round on his stool, fearful lest the page was reading over his shoulder; but he was alone in the little armour-crowded room, alone with Roger Cotes.

Impaling the King's note on the dagger, Culpeper flung the other, the Queen's, into the fire and stabbed at it with a rusty old sword until it was grey ash. For on that paper had been scrawled a message of terrible import; badly written, vilely spelt, and confusedly put together as it was, it was for all that, treasonous. It said, in clear English, not as it was written: "You have not asked in vain. I have a velvet cap I made for you with my own hands. Under the gallery at night, come, I will throw it to you if you fear to climb."

"Do you know what was written there?" Culpeper turned on the youth, realising that by his gestures he had already given himself away beyond redemption. In this moment of horror he thought: Will I kill him? He holds my life in his hands, and her life. I could kill him with that new arquebus. I could say that it went off suddenly while I was showing him how it worked; the trigger's loose, and it's loaded. . . .

Cotes, as if aware of what Culpeper thought, looked him steadily in the eyes, and spoke quietly. "I cannot read," he said, "so how can I know what her grace wrote? Besides, it was sealed."

"You are loyal?"

"I have known her since she was a child. I have seen her grow. I have learned many of her secrets and have never spoken one."

"Although there is no need for secrecy," said Culpeper, lying badly. "She is my cousin, you know? Her mother was Joyce Culpeper, my father's sister. We were bred as children. She has sent a secret message to me, just asking—asking me to give her back some pearls of hers I have kept since childhood."

He leaped to his feet, unable to meet Cotes' puzzled glance.

"Quick!" he cried, bustling about with sudden energy and pulling down a pile of helmets that fell with a terrific clatter all around him. He jumped back just in time, but even then one burgonet bruised his wrist. "Damn," he said. "Nearly got me that time. Pick them up, will you, while I look round? What would they need, do you think? I must get close-helmets large enough to hold their hair, and plates small enough for their little bones. She is very tiny, isn't she? How tall, say you? Five feet? or less? Yes, perhaps a little less. I have a boy's suit somewhere, that would do splendidly. I'd like to see the sport; are they to be alone or is the Court to go? . . ."

He chattered on, while Cotes slowly picked up the fallen helmets and piled them in two stacks: he talked to stop himself thinking. Like the inevitability of death, midnight hung before him, drawing every second of time closer and closer, stiflingly.

Midnight, and it was terribly cold. Nipped to the bone, wrapped in a heavy black velvet cloak, Culpeper stole along, pressed against the creeper-covered brick walls, frightened at every step lest it be the watch coming on its rounds. Everything was black around him, trees showed ghostlike, dim. There was no moon, no clouds. The earth this Easter seemed caught in an ebony globe in which he stumbled, terrified, holding the cloak high above his white face. He hugged the wall under the gallery, and waited.

He had never known such agony of suspense. It was worse, far worse, than waiting in the lists for the trumpet-call that meant that he must face his antagonist. This waiting now was worse even than that, worse than the heavy rattling thud of a man in armour hurled from his horse. He remembered the festivals at Durham House when Anne of Cleves had first come to England. They had carried a man past where he stood awaiting his turn ; they had unlocked the beaver and flung back the visor, and the red face was revealed with the blood trickling up into the open mouth like muddy water in a spring, welling up over the lips and soaking into the beard. He was stunned. And in a minute he, Tom Culpeper, must mount his Great Horse, lay lance at rest and thunder down the list towards his thundering enemy, as that man there had done.

The actual joust had been so small after what he had dreaded. Everything became small when you faced it. Even death, perhaps, would be like that : the bogy close up revealing, like a childhood's demon, the grotesque paint-marks that had looked so fearful from a distance. Nothing was terrible when you faced it ; even a woman was not dangerous when you held her in your arms.

It must be midnight. It was very still—no wind, no rain. In the distance the dogs barked in their

kennels and fell to whimpering. Somewhere on the stone flags he heard the slow, heavy tread of armed men, the rattle of spear-hafts on the ground—the watch—and shrank back even farther against the wall. The watch came closer, talking softly, a lanthorn shining in one man's hand, another poking idly with the blade of his spear into the evergreens that bordered the path. They were discussing women, telling the usual grandiloquent masculine lies of easy conquests, and laughing smugly in their beards; one of them, a little behind the others, said suddenly in a snuffling tone: "Have your laugh out, boys, but remember that while ye're out here working, your wives are at home and ain't got nothing better to do than to warm their husbands' pallets." . . . "Shut your stinking breath," snarled the man with the lanthorn. Another man, his cuirass glittering as he bent down, felt his own foot, and groaned: "Bunion's getting worse," he growled. The man with the lanthorn stopped and said in a stern voice: "Ye never tried that what I told you? White wine and oil of St. John's wort and the poison-bag of a serpent rubbed on every night'll cure ye." . . . "I ain't caught no serpent yet," growled the other. . . . "Ye ought to buy one then, they're cheap enough. There's a cunning man in Fleet Street in London . . ."

The voices trailed off into a distant hum, and Culpeper let the breath come into his mouth. He realised by his reaction how tense the situation had been. He shook in every limb and his teeth chattered.

Then he heard the rasp of a window above being flung noisily open, and Kate's voice say in a weary tone, "The night air'll make me well. Don't wait up, please. Jane, you stay. I'll be all right in a minute. It must have been that mummery with the armour, the helmet was so hot. How can men fight in things like that? I dreamt of swords and

blood. Don't bother. Go to sleep, all of you. I command you to go!"

Culpeper shuddered at the sound of her soft, bird-like tones. He hated her at that moment. He felt that he was a fool to stop here, he should leave at once. Her trick was so blatant. One of those damned women would be sure to stay awake and steal upon them.

"Are you there?" came a gentle whisper.

He caught the creeper and shook it and found that it was stout enough to hold him. The windows were not seven feet away, an easy climb. He took a deep breath and swung himself up into the darkness. In his fear and rage, he swung himself higher than he realised, and suddenly found himself facing Kate; the creeper crackled threateningly, he caught the window-sill and hung there, gripping with both hands.

Her eyes in the darkness glittered their whites like snow. A candle burnt behind her, lighting up her unbound hair as if it were afire.

Then her mouth was on his.

Something in Culpeper went suddenly mad. It shouldered aside that shrinking youth, and he found himself seeming to look upon himself, startled, amazed, and yet admiring. For this new creature that had abruptly risen inside him was a youth of courage who swung himself on to the window-sill and landed lightly inside the gallery, almost knocking Kate over.

He saw a white hand descend on the candle: then everything was black.

He could not see the woman in his arms. He knew that she was small because her head did not reach to his chin, but he felt her mouth on his cheek, on his eyelids, he felt her body pressed against him.

But it was not Tom Culpeper who held her. It

was another being, a man of action and of strong desires.

They did not speak, they dared not speak. They slid to the floor; he heard naked feet running on tiptoe and wondered vaguely who it could be, then realised that it was Lady Jane gone to keep guard. He was lost abruptly into a new unbelievably ecstatic world. He did not know that the touch of her hand could mean so much to him.

It was a moment's embrace: no more. He had her in his arms, they were on the floor, the rushes icy on their bodies, but even as they slid down, came Lady Jane's quick steps, her whisper, "Somebody's coming! Jump!"

It had seemed they had been together for an eternity. Not two minutes had passed since he first grasped the creeper, and now he had to leave. He could not leave without another kiss. He pressed his mouth on hers, on her eyes, her throat, her chest, while she pushed him away. There was something in her hands, something she wanted to give him. Of course, the cap! He took it, stole one last kiss, then leaped down into the night.

The fall jarred along his spine but did not hurt him. He could not walk, he had to run. A demon possessed him. He wanted to run, to get drunk, to do the most lunatic things; he was numbed in a kind of madness like the holy madness of a saint. His pulse still beat feverishly—for he had held the Queen in his arms, for a moment he had held the Queen in his arms! . . . If only that disturber had waited another half-hour, another ten minutes, five minutes even. . . . Ah, but he would meet her again if all the King's guard stood between her and him.

In the gallery, Queen Kate gazed languidly on the chamberer, Marget Morton, who had come to see if she felt better.

"No," said the Queen, "I feel much worse. I am going to bed. . . . I never felt worse in all my life," said the Queen with a spiteful look.

Tom Culpeper had never felt better in all his life. When he reached his chamber, he sat down, panting, then darted to the mirror and gazed at himself; he had not changed; he had seen that face a billion times before; but he felt so different, so terribly different.

In his hand was the cap she had made for him with her own hands: a square, soft, blue velvet cap embroidered with silver and little twisted friars' knots. In the lining was the letter K twisted around T, both entwined in a red heart.

I will never miss a chance of seeing her again, he swore.

But he did not get that chance, not for months and months, so difficult was it to be a Queen.

PART TWO

CHAPTER SIX

Royal Progress

THE NORTH had rebelled, and Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, had helped Suffolk to put it back into its place with his steel hand. That small dark man with the cruel smile, the greatest soldier in all England, loved that kind of task. He girded on his armour and felt young again. It was no weight to him, he liked to be clamped down, to be hidden; he liked to feel his muscles swell as he strove to bend his arm in the vambrace, to hear the jangle of steel, and to whirl his clean sword in his gauntleted fist. His face looked its worst under a velvet cap: it needed a burgonet to peer out of, mockingly, the eyes as bright as the steel.

So Norfolk had ridden North, to his own land, and had hanged as he willed. That was five years ago now, but the King had not forgotten. Lincolnshire and Yorkshire were to witness what England could do when it willed; it was to see the King in all his colours and wealth and power, and it was to pay in hard cash for its temerity in daring to rebel against the King's Church. Norfolk and Suffolk, the two men who had crushed rebellion, rode ahead to prepare for Henry's arrival. They did not ride now in their armour, but high-handed they were, wringing the citizens of their own land out of their money. And Henry had sent pressing, too pressing, invitations to

his sweet nephew, James, King of Scotland, to meet him in York.

This was in June, and the progress was to start on the last day of that month. And as a warning to his southern subjects, Henry struck terror before he left. He cleared the Tower of its prisoners. Outspoken Reginald Pole's mother was carried to the block. She was very old and had been attainted of treason in 1539, without trial—the custom that Cromwell had introduced, and had himself been attainted by—she was loved by all, and her only crime was that she was the mother of Pole, the hope of the Yorkists. But a King must wear a gauntlet, not a glove ; he must be cruel if he would keep his throne, and Henry's throne had no tradition behind it ; his father had been the first Tudor to reign ; death, the death of others, had become to Henry something quite casual and of little importance.

In the cold morning, at seven o'clock, the Countess of Salisbury, Pole's aged mother, was led to the block on Tower Green. No scaffolding had been built, so secretly was it done, and she muttered querulously as she walked, saying that this was all most peculiar because she couldn't think of any crime she had committed. She was almost seventy, and the executioner, a young blunderer, hacked at her wrinkled shoulders again and again, until the place was thick with blood, before he lopped the head.

One or two others were killed, and quite a few were spared at the last minute.

After that, Henry felt that he could safely begin his progress.

It was the grandest sight London had seen for many years when Henry rode under the houses of London Bridge upon his progress.

June 30, 1541, and the city hung flags from its

windows, festooned the streets with arches, and waited in sweaty ranks to see their King leave them. Henry sat his horse. Leg or no leg, he would not be tossed in a litter. He sat astride firmly, his toes out arrogantly each side in the stirrups, while behind him, Sir Anthony Browne led his Great Horse caparisoned in green and white and with beribboned tail. The company numbered from four to five thousand: there were men on horses, men on foot, women in litters, on horses and on mules, carts with victuals, carts with tents, and carts with clothes: they rumbled on under the houses of London Bridge, and for hours the shipping was held up, for the drawbridge could not rise.

First strode the men-at-arms in their crimson coats guarded with gold, and with crimson caps, swinging their short spears over their shoulders, left hands on swords, the sergeant wielding a curve-bladed halberd. The golden five-petalled Tudor Rose was upon all their backs like gigantic butterflies. After the men-at-arms rode the Gentlemen, two by two, in all the wealth of fashion, embroidered beplumed caps, cloaks curling on the horses' rumps, jackets flung back to show the rich doublets, hands afire with jewellery as they toyed with the gem-studded reins; after them came their squires and pages, in livery, their masters' insignias bound on their right arms; then the Clerks of the Signet and the Privy Council; then trumpeters with bright tabards hanging from the trumpets that rested on their hips; then Knights, and Knights of the Bath, Knights Banneret, Knights of the Privy Council, and Knights of the Garter—a gorgeous show of colour, of orders and clothes, men with chains at their necks, chains dripping to their chests in a dazzle of jewels; all coloured stuffs they wore—reds, blues, violets, purples, scarlets, crimsons, greens, lemons, yellows—velvets and satins of every shade and of

every cut; proud horses lifted high their hoofs in rich caparisons; Clarencieux, King of Arms, the principal of the College of Heralds. . . . There were so many of them, so rich were the colours, it was like a blinding rainbow through London's narrow streets, curving down lanes and into courts, last drinks being passed to them from high tavern-windows; on all sides the jingle of harness, the rattling of steel, the sunlight shone upon sword-hilts, on the metal stirrups and horses' bits. It was a muddle of colour, of gold and silver and flashing steel in the spring weather; great cloaks swung wide to show scarlet lining, plumes on caps, long ostrich-feathers nod-nid-nodding. . . . It stretched for miles, with the King in the centre, and not far behind him, the young Queen in her horse-litter, smiling with littlest teeth upon the loyal, cheering crowd.

Tom Culpeper rode with the Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber, and was nowhere near the Queen. She lay in her green and white horse-litter, her quick eyes always seeking for a glimpse of him.

They had not spoken one word together since that night at Greenwich, that brief uprush of kisses from hearts starved for love; but they had never ceased to think of each other. At this moment Culpeper wore the blue cap she had given him, with its friars' knots. He loved her now, without fear of consequences. She had but to beckon and he would come; he would come if all the guard stood in stiff armour to beat him back.

Her love had changed him greatly, she had given him something definite to dream about, to aim for, a purpose. Lowly that purpose, carnal and treasonable it may be, but it was a thing of magic. Perhaps he was bewitched. It showed the change in him that he did not care if he was bewitched. But he did

not believe it. God had not given man this fire in his bosom if it were evil. Evil perhaps to love another man's wife, especially a Queen, but surely, even in that, God must have some inscrutable purpose? It was a curse, a tribulation, but he loved her; God, he felt, could not be really cruel to lovers.

With London behind it, the progress lost much of its order as it rode through the open fields, where the half-naked labourers harvested the hay and gazed with open, stupid mouths at the mob of lords and gentlemen; the wenches ran and hid and goggled from behind bushes and walls to see so many handsome men like gods.

Henry dropped behind to jest with his Queen, some of the knights slid up amongst the gentlemen to be with friends, others of the gentlemen mingled with the knights; the pages gathered together; some horsemen raced ahead for a drink at the first inn or tavern in sight.

Henry reined in his horse beside the Queen's litter, and gazed at the curtains, on which were embroidered Kate's arms: a shield with three gold fleurs-de-lis on a blue ground in the centre, and on either side, ermine flaunches curving in and containing each a red rose; the whole enclosed in a chaplet of leaves and of red and white rose; the royal crown on top of all.

"My love," cried Henry, and tapped on the woodwork. The curtains were immediately flung up, and Kate looked out with a wan smile.

"Hook the curtains up, please, love," she whispered.

He fixed the curtains with hooks and eyes to the rim of the litter. Actually, it was a kind of couch covered with a feather-bed and cushions, and strapped on long poles to the horse's sides. These poles rose high, and cloth had been stretched across the top to keep out rain or sun.

Kate had not been well for weeks, and Henry had almost decided to forgo the progress, but she had insisted on its taking place. This progress meant more —far more—to her than Henry would ever realise.

"Better, little sweet wolf?" he asked, blinking and peering at her.

She smiled languidly. "Better after seeing my Harry look so gallant," she said. "It's very sultry," she added: "do you think it'll rain?"

Henry wrinkled up his face under his scarlet bonnet to gaze at a sky that was rapidly hiding its blue behind a scum of hard, brilliant clouds that almost blinded him as if he gazed into a frosted-glass lanthorn.

"It's warm enough," he murmured, "and those clouds do look dangerous." He turned to the Earl of Rutland, the Queen's Chamberlain, who rode nearby. "What think you, Thomas?" he asked. "Is rain coming?"

The Earl glanced up under his cap, brushing the green plume out of his eyes.

"I'm no prophet," said he, "but by all the tokens, I think we'll have a storm within the hour."

Henry looked nervously up and down the long line of men, women, horses, and carts.

"Ay," he said, between his teeth, "I think we'll put up at Enfield for the night. I had meant to stop there only a while, but I'll take no risks. Boy, there!" he called to a distant page leading one of the ladies' horses. "Run you ahead to the Earl of Sussex. Tell him we stop at Enfield Palace."

The sky grew heavier every moment. All along the line, men glanced upwards from under their plumes and caps. The drivers with the carts were hurriedly covering the delicate fabrics therein with canvas and fustian, and trying to place the perishable spices and grain under the salted meats. The oxen

plodded on, refusing to be goaded, kicked, or cajoled into speed.

Oxen, like the oxen of Fate's car in the tapestry at Hampton Court. Culpeper smiled grimly as he watched the men in leather and fustian jackets prodding the stupid beasts with spears, and thrashing them with whips. Let it rain! It would cool the poor beasts and wash away the flies and other insects. What did oxen care, what did Fate care, for a few drops of water? It seemed to Culpeper, as he watched the dull, stubborn beasts with their brown, melancholy eyes, that Fate drove with them. He remembered every detail of that tapestry: Lucrece offered the knife, Cupid bound, and Chastity at her last ebb.

"Let's race!" cried Paston. "We stop the night at Enfield, I hear. A rabbit-hutch. We'll have to seek lodgings outside, and the village is tiny."

Already, the green-clad harbingers were galloping ahead to seek lodgings for the knights and to arrange the palace for the King, and many of the knights and gentlemen spurred on their horses, fearful of getting their expensive clothing wet. And above, the clouds rolled heavily, darkly over the sky, blotting out every inch of blue; there was a rumble of distant thunder, and the air seemed difficult to breathe, sluggish, and pressed against the men's faces as if it were solid; no wind came anywhere to rustle the smallest leaf; not a bird sang. Everything was still and quiet, the atmosphere curiously translucent, so that the landscape was vivid, yet dead, as if clipped out of a painted book.

Culpeper glanced back, but he could not see the Queen in the press of hurrying people all glancing upwards with wrinkled brows; then he spurred his jennet and darted on, beside Paston. They caught up with a string of carts, men shouting and cursing, tugging at the harness, shaking their fists at sky and

beasts ; quietly the oxen continued their way, refusing to get excited ; one cart had overturned, and its two wheels pointed at the sky, the rims studded with thick nails : it had been pulled by a horse, and the beast now cropped quietly at the grass while the little men darted around, picking up rich fabrics and brushing the dirt from them ; the field was bright with clothes just there, as if it had erupted in a scarlet-and-blue rash.

A rotten road ! all ridges and puddles ! One knight went sprawling from his horse into a prickly bush. They waved their caps at him and cheered as they galloped by.

The cortège had lost all semblance of a procession. Everybody was actuated by a desire to get under cover before the storm burst out of those dark, swollen clouds. The footmen grumbled in their beards as the horses were flogged past, they glowered up, trailing their pikes as if at a funeral. The carts struggled gamely on through the ruts, but already they were being left behind.

Henry stayed with his Queen chivalrously, like an old-time errant knight, who faced death rather than desert his paramour, but he searched his mind to find an excuse to leave her.

"Ride ahead, sir," she cried. "I'm safe enough, the covering will protect me. They need you ahead. Make all comfortable for me and see that great fires are lighted."

He smiled merrily at her. "For your comfort alone I go," he cried, and bowed gallantly before he spurred his horse.

The women were now left almost alone, save for the foot soldiers and a scattering of gentlemen pages—henchmen, as they were called—who had no horses and tried sullenly to drag short cloaks over their crimson jackets. Lady Jane sat side-saddle, both feet

on the steel bracket: she wore a green mask to keep the dust away from her fard-painted face, but that was no protection against rain; the other ladies and maids either rode side-saddle or lay on horse-litters or sat on chairs strapped to the horses' backs. All gazed speechless with horror at that sky, for they had dressed themselves in their best.

Only the Queen, with her covering of cloth reinforced with canvas above her, felt at rest as she curled herself on the cushions and clung with both hands to the poles on either side. The youth who led her horse gazed up darkly, his golden beard clipped to a point, his blue eyes dull with resentment. He was Roger Cotes and was dressed in the King's livery, green and white, with Kate's gold rose and her three fleurs-de-lis on a blue ground embroidered on his back. He had been drinking, as was usual with him of late, and his handsome blue eyes were shot with little red veins and sunk in violet hollows. He sneered as he walked. Dressed like a gentleman, in the Queen's household he had suffered jeers and insults that were intolerable.

"She's but a woman and walks on legs," he muttered to himself as he punched the horse's head in a moment of rage. "If she'd been poor I might've married her. Who knows? I don't. Damn!"

He fell back and gazed up at the curtains that hid the small young woman from his eyes, this woman who could never be his, because he was simple and she well-born and now a Queen.

"She's the same under her harness as any Sister of the Bank," he muttered. "Ain't no difference. What she write to that peppercull for? That's what I'd like to know, be-gogs."

The curtains parted and her white face gazed at him, a red wisp of hair straggling down as she leaned forward.

"Were you speaking to me, Roger?" she asked.

He shuffled. "No, your grace," he muttered. "Just talking to myself, like a Tom O'Bedlam. I been drinking."

"Oh, Roger, you mustn't drink. It's bad for you."

"Yes, your grace." Scarlet to the tip of his nose, he looked from side to side, then darted suddenly forward and seized the horse by the bridle.

"Come on, big eyes!" he snarled at it. "Ye don't want to get wet, do ye?"

Kate watched him for a moment, then glanced back at her ladies; seeing that some of them watched her, she swiftly withdrew her head and slipped the hooks and eyes together. Above her, the glare soaked through the awning and shone like gentle candlelight upon her face.

It was the glare of a hidden sun giving out heat more unbearable than its full rays could send; it blinded those ladies and soldiers and pages and the gentlemen pensioners with their gilt battleaxes. The clouds were swelling together, like a meeting of ships on a blue ocean, the sails dirty with months of voyaging, mingling and bellying out, one against the other.

At Enfield, all was scramble and hurry and fuss. It was but a small palace—if it could be given such a title—built roughly in the shape of the letter U laid flat. The court was roughly paved, the walls of plaster. Now this court was crowded with men and horses and carts. The stables at the back were full, and in all the surrounding fields, carts were being unloaded, tents were being hurriedly set up. Henry himself had to struggle through the court before he could enter the sharply-arched doorway.

His household had worked hard preparing for his arrival. Fires were laid and tables were ready for food. In the kitchen, the fat Master Cook, in his

velvet robes and with the gold chain about his neck, was hoarse with shouting at the cooks and weary of trying to kick the eel-like kitchen-boys. Feathers were thick on the stone floor, already the place ran with the blood of decapitated fowls and beasts. Never had food been prepared so quickly and so crudely in a royal palace. All was fret and fume, waiting for the spices to come; without spices, a cook was doomed, for his one effort was to hide the flavour of food, every dish was nearly half spice, stinging with a multitude of outlandish tastes: almonds alone were used in at least two-thirds of the known dishes.

THEN the rain came: it roared down, caught the men in the midst of tent-building, while they heaved on ropes and hammered the pins into the ground. It drenched them within a minute, knocked over boxes and nails and capcases and bedding, sizzling out half-hearted fires. Culpeper had arrived early, and finding every room in the village occupied and defended by armed and determined men, he had his tent secure when the rain came: but he was unable to use it. With Paston and a dozen others, he stood on guard, on every side a man stood with drawn sword and dagger, keeping off wet men and women who fought to enter.

Kate arrived dry, except in spots where the water had trickled through the awning, but her women were all soaked to the skin: the paint had run on their faces, the grease glittered on their hair, the painted veins on throat and breast were smudged, as if they had been pummelled and bruised. Miserable, trying to hide from the men, they slipped upstairs, clattering on their wooden clogs, to dry themselves before the fire and to moan and weep over beautiful ruined garments.

"Let's eat alone!" cried the King, when Kate came

to him, newly combed and brushed. "I want none of my goats and none of your hens, just us two?"

"That is my dearest wish," said Kate, "to be alone with you."

The table was swiftly laid on trestles and, muttering to themselves when outside the door, the serving-men brought the utensils upstairs into the King's Privy Chamber, carrying them from the Hall where they had first laid them.

Kate and the King sat before the fire, he on a chair, she on cushions at his feet, while the men worked. It was elaborate work to lay a King's table, even when he ate alone like this. The gentleman usher with his white wand came to supervise the yeomen-sewers laying the cloth, each bowing three times as he entered; then came the great silver salt-cellar that divided rank, it was placed before the King's seat, then trenchers of four-days'-old bread, four slices laid together, for the hot plates to be put on: each man kneeling three times at every act. Up from the kitchen came the foods, after the King and Queen had seated themselves side by side upon a carved oak-settle, and grace was mumbled by Henry. At the first whisper of grace, the gentleman-sewer fled to the kitchen to ask the panter if fruits and butter were to be served, to ask the cook and surveyor what meats were ready. The cooks passed the dishes through the opening in the walls, hooking up the leather and wood flaps, the surveyor delivered them, and the marshals and yeomen-sewers passed the foods along the corridors, holding pieces of bread under the hot silver plates to protect their hands, until at last they reached the yeomen-of-the-guard, and from the guard the piled-up plates went into the chamber, where the gentleman-sewer himself set them on the steps of the dresser, taking those needed to the table. Opposite the King, a little above the salt-cellar, the carver

waited with his knives, a white towel crossed around his neck and trussed through his girdle to wipe the knives on. He held the meat in the thumb and first fingers of his left hand, and carved with his right, gripping a knife, three inches broad, with two fingers and thumb. But first, before the meat, came pottage drunk with spoons, then a leg of pork, followed by the second course: roast mutton, glazed pigeons, fritters, capons, and a few beans, cabbage and carrots, this was followed by sweet foods, although all foods were sweet enough, even the meats being coated with sugar and honey. The plates were put upon the four trenchers of stale bread on to which the gravy slopped: these were afterwards given to the greyhounds or the beggars.

Next to the carver stood the butler with the wines, and before the King drank, the butler first must drink a little in a white wooden bowl to see that it held no poison; and before the King ate, the sewer must taste the meat to find if it was wholesome.

The King ate enormously. He stuffed the meat into his mouth, cutting it with a knife and, against all courtesy laws, stabbing the knife into his little mouth. He munched, the meat and vegetables popping from side to side, from cheek to cheek, his eyes shining with the happiness of eating good food; he cared not for courtesy books, he jabbed his knife, greasy as it was, into the salt-cellar, he blew his nose on his napkin, he spat into the washing-bowl—he was the King.

He drank while he ate, swilling good sweet Rhenish. Everything was sweet: the meat was soaked with sauces of parsley, hyssop, garlic, quince, grape, pear, and wine; the meat itself came sometimes in coffins—great pastries—glittering with sugar, hiding haunches of venison cooked to rags and powdered with vinegar, ginger, and pepper and salt; custards of veal boiled

with parsley, sage, savory, and hyssop, smeared with pepper, cinnamon, cloves, mace, saffron, and drenched with wine, stiffened with eggs, all buried under a pastry coffin with dates and ginger and verjuice. Foods that were half-sweet, half-meat; and when the meal had passed, dessert came of perfumed fruits and candied flowers, violets, roses, primroses, and hawthorn, and creamy sugar-meats, marchpane, and candied sea-holly.

Kate ate more daintily than the King, although it was difficult to be dainty when in front of you were placed only three knives, their hafts pointing away from you, and one spoon, and you had to use fingers. The table was quite small, and she was wedged very close to the King, his elbows sometimes jabbing into her corsage; she could hear very loudly the warm, smacking sounds of mastication, could see the gravy running into his beard, and the stained, broken teeth snapping at meat. She was forgotten. A greater lust than woman had come between them—the lust for food. He ate as if he were starved, as if he might never eat again; and she was hurt to notice his disinterest.

This was the first meal they had had alone together since his courtship: and in those days he had been daintier.

Men fell on one knee to offer more things for that little mouth to crush and bolt into the great belly. His belly was a furnace that must be smothered, drenched. Anything was thrown into it. He grabbed from dish to dish, and when food was on its way and he was forced to pause, he would seize a handful of almonds or raisins and fling them into his mouth.

At last, when he was finished, this great whale, he belched contentedly, washed his hands in warm scented rose-water, sighed, and stretched his legs before he started that philosophic pleasure of picking

his teeth with his knife-point and rubbing them on his napkin.

Now that he was at rest, Kate could not believe that this was the same man who had eaten so greedily beside her.

DOWN came the rain outside, tumultuously. Tents fell in the downpour, spilling men and women, smothering them in heavy, wet folds of canvas—for there were just as many female camp-followers to this progress as there was when an army moved into battle. It was a ghastly night. They slept in mud and water, wrapped in coils of clothing.

Groaning, sodden to the skin, their bones creaking with damp, the great cortège of gallants lay in the rain under fallen tents, too exhausted and sleepy to lift them again ; some drunkards were drowned in ditches ; many a man was robbed in the blackness and confusion.

It was the first night of the progress, that triumphant progress on its way to shame a rebellious North.

MORNING brought no sun. The clouds were still heavy in the sky, although for the moment the rain had stopped. The little village of Enfield was besieged by a hungry and thirsty mob who sought food and warmth. There were not enough houses to cover a quarter of the crowd that swarmed in the streets and roamed over the wet fields, their feet sinking into the grass, their shoes squelching at every step.

The harbingers that morning had a busy time, trying to lodge everybody and to see that the tents were apportioned correctly and the owner's arms showing on vanes above each one. Culpeper, Paston, and a dozen others sat around a fire that crawled fitfully over the wet twigs and soggy leaves. They had no intention of moving unless they had to.

The roads ahead were impassable; messengers came riding to Enfield Palace with sad news of carts bogged and rivers flooding. It was impossible to continue.

"Damn!" said the King to his councillors: the Privy Seal, the Great Lord Chamberlain, the Vice-Chamberlain, the Comptroller of the Household, the Master of the Horse, the second Mr. Secretary, and the Earl of Hertford.

"Damn!" said the King to these high and mighty councillors, as they sat in the Enfield Privy Chamber on the second day of July, the second day of the royal progress, at ten o'clock on the cold, wet morning.

"Damn!" said the King a third time. "Well, gentlemen, what affairs hold us to-day? This is a day for work. God curse the rain!"

The councillors commented on the rain, they talked glumly together, seeing that the King was working himself up into one of those terrible furies of his in which great men were kicked and cuffed and the whole of England damned as an ungrateful land of unhappy people whom he'd make so poor that they wouldn't have the boldness or the power to oppose him. These tempers were growing with his fat, and his opinions changed overnight. The lords of the council shuffled on their stools, and at last, to distract the King, Sir Anthony Browne suggested that His Highness out of his great mercy might reconsider the case of Lady Dacres.

"What's the wench been up to?" said the King, not properly hearing what was said, for his thoughts were elsewhere; and everybody looked more glum than ever, and the King glared at them for letting him slip into such a *faux pas*; for Lady Dacres' husband had been hanged on the 29th of last month for, while poaching, murdering one John Busebryge.

"Yes, yes," said the King, "I remember now. The

rascal poached and murdered. Give her something, we can't let her starve."

"I would suggest fifty pounds," said the second Mr. Secretary, Sir Ralph Sadler, stroking his beard and looking philanthropic.

The others squabbled, some suggested more, some suggested less, for her lands, as the property of a criminal, had been sequestered by the King and she was now penniless; but at last they decided on £50, and a letter was written by Mr. Secretary to the Chancellor of the Tenths, and another to Mr. Sackfield, Sheriff of Sussex, to deliver to her "all her apparel of velvet, satin, pearls, stones, or goldsmith's work, pertaining as well to her head as to the rest of her body."

"We mustn't be too hard on the jade," said the King, fingering the gold chain on his breast. "It wasn't her fault that her husband was a rogue."

Outside, the rain began again, pitter-patter on the glass of the windows as if crying for admittance. The great fire roared in the fireplace, its light twinkling like a mesh of transparent jewellery on arras and silver plate. It was growing dark again, the sun sliding behind masses of grey cloud.

"Ah, God," moaned the King, "will it never stop?"

It seemed that it would never stop; for even when at last the sun peeped out for a moment, and the King's golden eyes brightened as he gazed hopefully through the window, he had only to shout for his horse to have it begin again, as inevitably as if somebody had turned on a water-cock at the sound of his voice.

Cold and damp as it was in the fields, those men camped out there were luckier than those boxed in the palace. The King was in a colossal rage. Even

God he did not permit to thwart him. His will must be asserted, and to be imprisoned because the damned clouds wanted to weep drove him almost mad.

The yeomen-ushers limped about his presence chamber, stiff and aching with the kicks and cuffs they had received; even the lords were not above being attacked, and their cheeks were purple with indignation at being called such names as the King shouted at them. Will Sommers the jester, who had jeered with his usual licence, was flung down a flight of steps.

"Christ!" bellowed the King. "You rascals think you can rule me. I've only the scum left. You've slowly killed off every great man and kept the power. But you won't rule me, by God! You cheated me into killing Cromwell, the most faithful servant I ever had. Men like you killed More and Fisher. I'd rather have More by me now than sixty hundred lurching, grinning thieves like you. Get out, before I cut off your lousy heads!"

He raged, he bellowed like a bull. He had a king's temper, a temper that had never been restrained from childhood, although cunning Master Skelton had done his best with a birch rod—a temper that councillors had even prodded and flattered so that it could fall on the necks of their enemies. It fell on all sides. He was like a small boy locked at home. He wanted to go out, he wanted to continue the progress, he wanted to hunt, and God wouldn't let him go outside the door without drenching him to the skin.

Somebody must pay for it. In his rage, he sought out the Queen—and found her ill.

She was feverish, sitting before the fire with her women about her. She had refused to see anybody, but Henry was more than a mere body, he was the King.

He came in ready to roar and grumble, and found himself defeated by her illness. On every side, this abominable day, things conspired to put him in the wrong. Damn!

"It's only a slight chill," she said; "I'll be all right by to-morrow."

She was feeling ill! and when he realised that, his anger left him in a flash. He sat on a stool beside her and took her hand.

"Poor little pigesnie," he said. "I am a selfish dog. Here I have cursed because I can't go out, and you're too ill to move. But those damned rascals madden me, all out for themselves, all robbing me and killing each other. I'll never forgive them for murdering poor Cromwell, and More, good kind More, and brave old Fisher. By God, if Erasmus had been here they'd not have been satisfied until they'd got his head too. But I'm still King. They're after Cranmer now, but they won't get him, they won't get him, I say!"

"Poor dear!" she pressed his hand. "How worrying it must be to be a King!"

"But you," he said; "my troubles are nothing. You're sick? What a brute I am, full of my troubles, and you suffering! You have seen the physicians?"

Kate nodded wearily towards a cup on the mantelpiece. "He's given me a nasty mess to take," she said with a shudder. "It tastes like sour brine and bad cabbage."

Henry laughed, his bad temper completely gone for the moment.

"It'll do you good," he said.

He felt suddenly contented, sitting beside Kate like this, in front of a good fire. He felt young. This was his place: in the firelight, and around him, women; at his side, the woman he loved. He liked to have women about him, he liked the cool, comfortable feel

of their presence even though he did not see them. The windows were shut against the cold, and he felt as if the chamber was perfumed with women's breathing. There, in that corner, was pretty Anne Howard, Kate's sister-in-law, a rosy-faced, impudent little jade whose flesh seemed ripe to bursting out of her bodice, her black hair drawn up under a white coif. Bold little brach! The Queen's sister and half-sister sat apart, embroidering a damask napkin: Margaret, wife of Sir Thomas Arundel, had Kate's hair, but had serious eyes and mouth; with her was tart Isabel, Kate's half-sister and many years her elder: her husband, Sir Edward Baynton, was the Queen's Vice-Chamberlain; pretty as Isabel was, there was a suggestion of cruelty in her thin mouth and in her small brown eyes.

Yet, young or old, ugly, handsome, or beautiful, they were nevertheless all women—Great Ladies of the Queen's Household, Ladies of her Privy Chamber, Gentlewomen of her Privy Chamber, Ladies and Gentlewomen Attendant, Maids of Honour and mere Chamberers, all servants of the Queen. It was like an Eastern harem. Although he had tasted none of them, save this Kate at his side, Henry felt as if he possessed them in one vast embrace. They breathed for him to breathe, they moved to keep his vitality at heat, these women with their rosy faces lit by the firelight in broad splashes of flickering red and yellow. He heard them murmur together, a drowsy sound like flowers in the wind; they were flowers, all of them, and at his side the sweet flower that was his, wholly his, his rose without a thorn.

The women drew farther from them so that they could speak together without being overheard, for they were husband and wife as well as King and Queen; but they did not talk for a time.

They were silent, each hidden from the other.

At last the King, sighing, turned to Kate, and seeing that none were close, whispered: "It's only a chill? It isn't, isn't . . . what we hope?"

She bent to hear him, and he felt her breath, hot with a touch of fever, on his eyes.

"Would to God, your grace, that I could say yes," she murmured. "But it is said that women are like flowers, they do not open at once to the sunlight. Time must pass and spring must turn to summer before they blossom. We have been married only a year, and a year is nothing in human life."

Henry sighed. A year was little enough to her, perhaps, she was not yet even twenty, but to him, who was fifty, each year plucked another grey hair from his rapidly thinning head. What did time matter? He was young; old in body, but young in spirit, it was only statecraft that aged him—statecraft and this enforced idleness. Fifty wasn't old! Look at Norfolk, going on for seventy, and as spry as ever! Warham had reached eighty or eighty-two! Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, was about fifty-seven, and looked as if he'd live till a hundred, and he had married a girl of fourteen eight years ago! No, fifty was by no means old. His sore leg, his frustrated life, and the cares of kingship had robbed Henry of youth. But now he would begin to grow young. With Kate's vitality, he would return to the youth he had never had.

All he wanted from life was this: to sit before a fire with her whom he loved; only a son was needed to complete the trinity of joy. Old? He was not old! Women were like flowers, as Kate said; that was truth; but men were trees that took years to reach their maturity and strength. Men's bodies were hard and brittle, women's were moist and plastic, quickly ripened, quickly perished, quick to bring forth and quick to turn barren; girls of twelve

were old enough to consent to marriage, but a boy must be fourteen. It was right, therefore, that elderly men should wed young girls, the girl in her full beauty—was not seventeen the age of woman's beauty and perfection?—the man in his full maturity.

"Do you love me?" he asked suddenly, scarcely realising why he spoke.

"Harry! how can you say that?" She pulled at the plume in his velvet cap playfully. "You are everything to me, everything! We have many, many years ahead of us. And later, surely God will be kind?"

But he wondered, he hoped . . . he dared not believe.

All night it rained, next day it rained; that night and the next day it rained; then the clouds broke and the sky revealed its innocent blue again, and birds were heard, and the ground shone, each blade of grass like a polished chip of green marble, the earth rich and moist as fresh cake.

And the King's bad temper was gone, he smiled, he jested.

"I will ride to St. Albans!" cried the King. "Sir Anthony! Sir Anthony! see to my horse!"

Kate would not go with him; and truly, she looked ill, as she lounged on cushions before the fire.

"Don't let me keep you, love," she said. "I mustn't come before your great affairs. A kiss for solace."

Ah, what delight to feel again a horse between his thighs! even though one leg was bandaged from knee to groin and ached at every lurch of the saddle! A strong man like Henry could not bear weakness, even in himself.

He rode off with his councillors and his courtiers, and he took Tom Culpeper with him.

When Kate heard that he took Tom Culpeper with him, she wept with rage. In her great double-bed she lay all day, and bit at the lace pillow. She was ill, said the ladies and gentlewomen and maids, and they walked on tiptoe in the Privy Chamber, and did not laugh very loudly.

Ah, said Kate to herself, twisting on the double-bed, her whole body prickly with fever; her skin seemed to belong to somebody else, being coarse and hot to her touch; ah, said Kate between her teeth, what fool of a wench would be a Queen!

She heard her women tiptoeing. On every side they tiptoed and whispered together, spying, talking about her. She hated them. And she had been a maid once herself to Anne of Cleves; she had never realised then how the Queen must have felt.

Women, women on all sides, catty, eager to show their claws; she could not speak to a man even in the Presence Chamber without being surrounded by watching women. How many of them were there? She tried to count them, seeing who was friend, who was foe.

There were, first, the Great Ladies of her Household. But they did not all live at Court. Only Lady Margaret Douglas stayed with her. Lady Margaret was in disgrace because of loving Lord Thomas Howard in '36, but the King had graciously permitted her to reappear for a brief while under the innocent wing of Katharine; and Lady Margaret, the King's niece, daughter of the Queen-Dowager of Scotland, had celebrated her return by ogling Kate's handsome brother, Charles.

After the Great Ladies came the Ladies of the Privy Chamber. First, the Countess of Rutland, a kindly woman, wife of the Queen's Chamberlain; then Lady Jane Rochford, Kate's dearest friend, the widow of George Boleyn, Queen Anne's brother, who

had died charged and convicted of incest and treason: it had happened so long ago that Kate had forgotten —if she had ever known—that Lady Jane's part in that affair had not been exactly a sympathetic one; it had been, in fact, rather a treacherous one, for not only had she spied on Anne, but had in court given evidence against her husband. After Lady Jane, came the Lady Edgecomb; and after Lady Edgecomb, Kate's half-sister, spiteful Isabel with the prim mouth and hard eyes: her husband, Sir Edward Baynton, the Queen's Vice-Chamberlain, had also had his part to play in the tragedy of Anne Boleyn, and it had been like the Lady Jane's, scarcely a sympathetic one.

Four Gentlewomen of the Privy Chamber: Mistresses Herbert, Tyrwitt, Ley, and Gilmyn; nine Ladies and Gentlewomen Attendant; six Maids of Honour; four Chamberers.

To the dis with their names! Kate was sick and tired of remembering them and seeing them, all except one or two, like Lady Jane and Lady Margaret. What else were they there for but to spy on her? They did not work, they did nothing but spy, listen, and watch.

Oh, said Kate, I wish that I were dead!

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Pact is Sworn

On 5th July the progress started again, this time from the old Roman town of St. Albans, to which Kate and her ladies had moved that morning, Kate beginning to feel a little better.

They were at Dunstable by the 7th, and at Ampthill by the 8th. Bad news from the North: the roads were thick with mud, and the rain had brought dry-rot with it, a kind of plague; the crops were almost destroyed just at the moment of harvesting. Like most strong men, Henry lived in terror of sickness. The word "Plague" was like a lazar-bell in the distance: he hid shivering behind bolted doors. His brother, Arthur, had perished of the sweating sickness, that strange disease from God that had first visited the realm in 1485 and had never since quite left it. A vile sickness it was, that attacked none but Englishmen; even when it appeared abroad, only English people fell before it, no foreigners were ever touched. Anne Boleyn had been caught in its grip, but with her amazing vitality she shook it off; forty thousand others in London alone had felt death coming that terrible summer of 1528; Anne's sister Mary's husband, Carey, died, and five in Henry's own household were attacked, including the apothecary. Death had been very close then, and Henry had never quite rid himself of the fear of dying before his life was fulfilled.

Nevertheless, by the 14th, he had plucked up enough courage to continue the progress as far as Grafton; but at Grafton he lingered.

Lodgings were better here. The harbingers had been some days ahead, and their figures in cloth of Kentish green had been like devils to the wretched inhabitants; all their stock of food was seized and little money paid in return; people were turned out of their own houses and whole families forced to lodge in one room, while their own apartments were decorated with flowers and clean straw or rushes for lords and gentlemen.

Into Grafton, on the 15th, the cortège wound its brilliant way, between the ranks of soldiers holding back citizens who glowered on all this finery of the locust-court, yet cheered despite themselves. Over streets strewn with hay and gravel, between the walls hung with flags, with girls flinging flowers on them from windows, the gallants rode behind the foot-soldiers.

CULPEPER and Tom Paston had been told to lodge together in the house of a tailor family, actually over a shop with bolts of cloth, with apprentices sitting cross-legged in the windows! The place smelt musty with old clothes, and Charles Howard, Kate's brother, who loved Lady Margaret Douglas, was lodged with them. They ran in and out of the door like thieves, and, when noticed by acquaintances, sauntered calmly inside as if to buy something.

The whole street was shops with overhanging balconies and coloured awnings drooping miserably over the cobbles. Lines of stalls were on each side, with stools for the customers to sit on. A most depressing locality.

"Wait till I see that dirty harbinger who fixed up this stinking place for me," grumbled Charles Howard. "I'll wring his skinny neck."

He was a brilliant dark man, was Charles Howard, with hazel eyes—he always wore red, brown, pink, or tan to bring out their golden tints—and with nasty

curling nostrils—nostrils that curved up at the sides as if the point of the nose was heavy. Culpeper disliked him, but tolerated his humours because he was Queen Kate's brother.

The tailor had a daughter of fifteen, and they saw her peering at them wherever they went. There was a hole in the wall of their dining-chamber where a knot in the wood had been, and constantly a blue eye gazed at them through it.

"One of these days," said Charles in his loudest, most ferocious tone, "I'm going to put my dagger in the fire till it is red-hot. Then I'm going to creep along the wall and jab it suddenly through that hole over there!"

The eye instantly disappeared, nor did they see it again, except, of course, with the rest of the gril.

"I think we ought to draw lots to buss her," said Paston, laughing. "Poor wench, she's never seen gallants before, very probably."

"A tailor's brat!" Howard raised his plucked eyebrows. "Filthy yourself with muck like that, if you want to. I look for something better."

"Tailors' brats are safer than some," said Paston, flushing; "they don't lead you to the Tower."

Howard glared at him: Lady Margaret's previous lover, Lord Thomas Howard, had ended his affair with her in the cold Tower of London.

"One of these days I'll kick that popinjay," growled Paston when he and Culpeper were alone. "Because his sister is Queen, and he naughts it with the King's niece, he thinks he is god of a dungheap."

"I can never understand," mused Culpeper, "how the same woman's body could have nourished all these Howards. None is the same, and one of them is sweet and beautiful. Their mother was my aunt, too—Joyce. I used to call her Mrs. Jocosa."

Paston looked up uneasily at him.

"Your thoughts still go that way?" he asked awkwardly.

"Don't question me, stay out of this." Culpeper leaped to his feet and slipped his sword into its hanger. "I'm going for a drink, Paz; if I lose my head, if I die in the Tower, I want to keep you out of this affair. I'll tell you nothing and you must ask me nothing. Come, let's drink."

EASIER said, however, than done. The taverns and inns could be recognised, not by the ivy wreaths on the signs, but by the enormous mobs around them. You had to fight to get near the yards, and when in the yard, you had to fight to get out again; any chance of scrambling up the steps was a thousand to one, and then attended by the risk of being crushed or mangled: that was at the inns; but taverns were no better, it was literally impossible to get through the doors, you couldn't have twisted a blunt dagger between the wedged pieces of humanity. All that you could do was to stand on the edge of the crowd and hope to recognise somebody ahead of you, pass him the money, who in his turn could pass the money to a friend of his still farther inside, until at last it reached the magic fount and was metamorphosed into a jar or cup of wine or ale.

Tired of struggling to get inside, Culpeper and Paston at last stopped at a tavern just outside the town, and noticing a friend a row or two ahead of them, gave him an angel. The man took the money and passed it on, shouting instructions. It passed from hand to hand on high so that the owner could keep his eye on it and see that it wasn't pouched. Back came a cup and a bottle of malmsey, in the same way, but they got no change.

"Don't bother about it," said Paston, who hated quarrels.

"The dirty robbers." Culpeper snapped off the neck of the bottle against a low stone wall that girded in the tavern-yard. "If I thought that there was any chance of getting at that taverner in such a mob, I'd shove this broken bottle in his face." He filled the cup and passed it to Paston, but before Paston had time to take it, a hand had shot forth from the crowd, seized it and lifted it to a large mouth in a lean, merry face.

"What in hell . . . !" cried Culpeper; then recognised Sommers, the jester. A gentleman couldn't fight with a jester. "Oh, drink it!" he said.

"I have drunk it," cried Sommers—you had to shout to be heard above the uproar—returning him the cup and rolling his eyes in their dark, sunken lids. "And all the thanks of me go with it. I thought you had sworn off wine, Mr. Thomas Culpeper?"

"Who told you that?"

Sommers shrugged. "It was no secret. You told everybody. Some of the everybodies told me. I like you, lad—you are honest, but you are a fool!"

"Ho, ho, when did the jester turn schoolmaster! Dubbed fool by a jester must certainly be a great honour! as great an honour, I dare say, as to be knighted by a king." Culpeper drank the fresh cupful and poured out another for Paston.

"I think it's my turn," said Sommers, taking it.

Culpeper laughed. "Go to!" he cried. "I like your boldness, man, even though I loathe your sauciness." He filled the cup. "Give us a toast!" he cried. "Drink to your sweetheart's name!"

"Only fools drink to their sweethearts in wine amongst so many," said Sommers. "Besides," he added sadly, "my sweetheart is dead. . . . And, Mr. Culpeper, you have a habit of confusing a fool with a jester. That is worse than confusing a yeoman with a knight. I know it's a common habit; like the vice in the play, the words in foolish mouths have come to

mean either. But it is not so. I wear no cap and bells and wag no bauble. I am a jester, not one of those mean creatures that sneak around kitchens, stealing bones, like dogs. You ask me for a toast. Well, here it is ! Let's pray that Mr. Culpeper learns sense from Will Sommers, and stops confusing a fool with a wise man."

"You're a saucy dog," said Culpeper. "Why do you always go for me? What have I done to be always your butt?"

"It's because I love you, lad. You have a conscience. You are one of the few men I know who has a conscience these days. And let me warn you" —his voice went low, he rolled from side to side, yet low as the voice was and great as was the hubbub around them, Culpeper heard every word—"no bull has the rage of a cuckold !" he whispered.

"What do you mean?" cried Culpeper.

"Naught," said the jester, still in the same low, clear voice, "naught and naught. There are two naughts, lad. One is safe, for you do that alone; one is dangerous because it needs a partner, and that partner must be a woman. Beware that naught like the plague. Not only does it burn some men, it kills others."

He returned the cup, and bowed. Culpeper would have stopped him from going, but already he was lost in the mob.

The two men gazed at each other, fearfully. All of a sudden, pleasure had gone from drinking.

Culpeper laid the bottle on the ground, and forced a smile.

"I am going," he said huskily, "to wait upon the King. Coming, Paz?"

Paston shuffled his feet and smiled nervously. "As a matter of fact, Tom," he said, "I was thinking, I thought I might . . ."

Culpeper waited coldly for him to finish, standing

motionless, with his eyes gazing sternly into his friend's eyes.

"I was thinking of that tailor's imp," muttered Paston. "She looked pretty to me."

"She's got a mouth as large as my foot and a figure as flat as my sword," said Culpeper, knowing that Paston lied. "You shoot at small game, suddenly."

"Less chance of missing the pin," answered Paston. "I'm not as sure an archer as you, Tom. I aim at any easy butt."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Don't let's quarrel——"

"Don't quarrel? Don't lie to me, then! You think I'm dangerous, you want to sheer off because you already see the rope round my neck! Get away, quick!"

"Tom, you're wrong . . ."

"Will you go before I lose my temper?"

They faced each other for a moment, Culpeper with his hand on his curling sword-guard, Paston trying to look pleasant and friendly. The people around slowly widened into a ring; the talking and laughter stopped; the men grinned, ready for sport.

But there was no sport. Amidst jeers and catcalls, Paston swung round suddenly on his heel and was gone.

Tom Culpeper was alone in a mob of strangers.

Will Sommers the jester, in his monkish habit, walked the narrow streets of Grafton, between old houses lounging together, the upper stories leaning dangerously outwards. The small, thin, stooping jester strode on his way, muttering to himself. A jester is permitted to mutter to himself, as nobody can accuse him of being mad, except as a compliment. He was muttering rather angrily, impressing an invisible companion on the enormous difference there should be between a fool and a jester. This was the one subject ever known to

anger him, the one thing at which he could not laugh —that, and the memory of his beloved wife, so recently dead of the sweating sickness.

"For a fool is a fool before God, and a jester is the only wise man," he grumbled. "I turn all the stupidities into sanity with a scoff. A fool turns all sanities into lunacies. A fool doesn't know what he does, and a jester knows only too well what he does and what he risks. I laugh because I fear to cry. I make men merry because I show their acts in a distorting mirror, a mirror that distorts with truth. A fool makes them laugh because he makes them think themselves wise in comparison with him. I have no bauble, no coloured ass-eared cap. I am not a zany, a witless ape of man. I am the only wise man because I know the dangers and futilities of everything except laughter. Damn that Tom Culpeper, he has soured me as if he pickled me. Why must I interfere? Only God can stop men from their own madness, and God is weary of trying."

He pushed through the crowded streets until he reached the fields, but even here humanity was before him, and he strode on, with his cowl over his head, his long legs kicking against the fustian frock, until at last he found himself alone, except for singing birds and stout trees, in a narrow, leafy lane. He turned a corner, and again humanity was before him. But this time it was one man only, Mr. Thomas Harman of the Privy Chamber.

"I couldn't seek a better friend," said Sommers, dropping into line beside him. "You are so good a man, Mr. Harman, that you will make me laugh. I do not mean that crudely. Only goodness can make me laugh nowadays, because it is so rare, so unwanted, and so useless."

Mr. Harman turned with his kind smile. "And is it really so useless, my friend?" he asked. "Surely only before man, not before God?"

"Nothing is useless before God," said Sommers seriously. "But if only He had given us a key, a hint. Even the Holy Book really tells us nothing of God's feelings towards us, only of man's awful terrors before Him and his efforts to cheat Him of His revenge. There must be a reason for life. We aren't here only to populate a heaven. Man doesn't deserve a God like Christ. Who'd die for all these rats!"

He snarled and kicked at a stone in the road; the stone was imbedded deep in the earth, and he only hurt his own foot.

"Damn!" said he. "Why, that perhaps is a sign! Why kick against what we don't understand? I wish I could be as placid as you, Mr. Harman, and not rage at man's wickedness."

"Placid?" said Mr. Harman. "Only belief in God keeps me placid. You don't believe fully, Will Sommers: that is your curse."

"If another man said that, I would kill him . . . but you . . ." Sommers walked on in silence. "Perhaps you're right," he said suddenly. "If I had belief I wouldn't lose my temper, I'd realise that there was a hidden purpose in everything. I wouldn't try to kick that rock, I'd know that God placed it there because it's right that it should be there; that it's there for some inscrutable purpose."

"Yet even I," said Harman, "suffer because sometimes I can't see beyond that surface, can't see around the rock before me that blots out the sunlight behind. I can see the cleansing purpose of suffering, but what I cannot understand is why man should deliberately drag suffering upon himself."

"That's what I can't understand," said Sommers. "I've been talking to a lad who, I fear deeply, is entering on dangers he doesn't realise. But he must realise them. He's not a fool. Why does he do it?"

"I saw you talking to Tom Culpeper," said Harman softly. "I, too, have thought often of the lad. You suspect what I suspect?"

"I suspect what I daren't say, even though I be a jester."

"Then it's true? I feared it. Look there, Will Sommers!" They had stopped at a turning, and they could glimpse ahead of them a handsome Court gallant meandering along with his arm around a country girl's neck, their backs towards Sommers and Harman. "Look at that," said Harman. "God knows, nobody feels softer towards lovers than I, but that's not love. The girl should ripen here with the harvest in the arms of a country clown, not have sin rushed upon her by a dazzling young fool who cares only for his own clothes and whom she will never see again. That's the kind of thing I cannot understand. Why do they do it? It isn't love. She's in love with his courtesy and his beauty, he thinks to huggle away an hour in her arms. Both know that, they aren't deceived. Then why do they do it?"

"Can there be a purpose, inscrutable to man, even in lust?" murmured Sommers. "I can see God's purpose in love clear enough. But in this carnal dole, what purpose is there?"

"I dare not ask," said Mr. Harman.

"Well, we are a merry pair!" said Sommers, bursting into a forced maniacal laugh that terrified the couple ahead so that they bolted like frightened conies to the bushes and struggled in, the man before the girl. Perhaps he thought the King was coming? "If only they feared God as greatly as they fear man's laughter!" said Sommers. "Come, Tom Harman, I must know you better; jester and gentleman, together we must drink deep and cry the wine out of our eyes. Let's stand apart, let's watch and pray and hope that together—I the jeerer at, you the lover of,

humanity—let us hope to find God's deep, hidden purpose in the flimsy things of life!"

"I have no hope of doing that."

"But let's try," said the jester. "Sillier men than us have been inspired. Will you join with me?"

"I will try," said Mr. Harman dubiously.

And they clasped hands, jester and gentleman, in the mud of the roadway, upon that pact of theirs. And perhaps God smiled in His heaven to see these mannikins of His own fashioning clasping hands on a pact to outwit Him in His purpose; but if He smiled, I am sure that it was with tenderness and with compassionate love.

A PURPOSE in this hurly-burly we call life? Presumptuous mannikins! Who but a jester would think of such a thing! A purpose in the blind meanderings of worms each bent upon its own base passions! Indeed, Will Sommers, there can be little difference between a fool and a jester, if you would waste your time in trying to find what men as wise as Solomon have never found, except in rare moments of abasement before the altar of God!

A purpose in love? in the passions that cloud men's brains, that turn them from sanity into madness? What is this love? Can Tom Culpeper tell as he drinks his wine, lonely and afraid? What does Tom Culpeper know of love? He knows that this loneliness is more agonising than anything he has ever felt, he knows that if he could clasp Kate in his arms his happiness would be so intense, so fiery, that it would not be happiness, that it would hurt like a knife in his heart. Pleasure in love? What fool thought of such a thing! The lover knows that there is little pleasure in clipping and kissing. It is an agony like the approach of death, like burning alive: flames edging up, the very blood afire, until momentarily, the

great relief, the deep unconsciousness like the unconsciousness of death, before the flames begin again, and again grow closer to the flesh.

Pleasure in love? Ask Tom Culpeper. Each second of his life was an eternity. He lived in the same world as Kate, he looked up at the same sky, heard the same birds, and trod the same firm earth of England; they were only three or four hundred yards apart at this moment: and he ached to embrace her, ached as if he were physically ill.

There is only pleasure in dead loves, when you can look back without a twist of the heart, with a sentimental smile, upon the torture that was once like hot coals in the bosom. But to be in love, to have each nerve and muscle quiver at a thought, at a memory of young lips, of hands moving in yours, of the sudden glimpse of love in loved eyes—that is hell.

Ask Kate, now in her palace, as she sits surrounded by her women who tend that young body of hers that must be given to the wrong man's embraces. She is naked for her bath. They have hung sheets above her and around her, made a small cloth room within the large wooden room; the top sheet sags with its weight of green sweet-smelling herbs. There is a sheet on the floor, and on the sheet a great sponge on which Kate sits; there is a sponge under her feet; and Kath Tylney and Marget Morton stand beside her—Morton holding the damask towel ready, Tylney with a sponge in one hand that she dips into the steaming silver basin of herbs and water. There is a tall mirror in front of Kate so that she can see all that they do without having to move: not half as nice as at Windsor, where the bathroom has floor, walls, and roof all built of mirrors.

Is she happy, being in love, as she sits there like a little goddess with the warm sponge tingling on her skin? She is waiting for that moment of freedom

when she can send messengers to the man she loves, when she can meet him in the darkness, alone. If only he had spoken earlier! if only she had believed him when he had spoken, even though he was drunk! Why had she married the King? If only the King would be cruel to her, her conscience would not sting so terribly. Why had she married him? Because she was young and he was the King, because she had been mad with vanity and very poor. . . . She would have been so happy as the wife of Culpeper—dear God, so happy!"

Kath Tylney has finished sponging, and now stands back, with head cocked on one side, apprising with large, admiring eyes that little naked Queen, as if the plump body was something of her own fashioning. She puts the sponge and basin aside, and takes up the basin of fresh, warm rose-water, and with her fingers she flicks the sweet water on to Kate.

And Kate sits dreaming, watching herself sitting in the mirror, dreaming of a lover that she can meet only by stealth and at a risk as terrible as the risk that eventually severed Anne Boleyn's little neck.

Happiness in love? Even in Culpeper's arms she would not be happy: all the time she would be gazing fearfully over his shoulder, she would be listening for the thump of the King's tall staff amongst the straw and the rushes.

And what of the King? Ay, he was happy, he was a dreamer. His love was a dream, a dream of purity and joy. He did not probe too far into his heart. But even there, below his happiness that was as frail and as beautiful as a lily glimmering on the darkness of a pool, there was the desire always to be with her when he was away from her, and deeper than that—the knowledge that he was growing old and that she was very, very young.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Love in a Progress

LIKE AN AWAKENING DRAGON, the progress started again ; it uncoiled itself from the town of Grafton, and began once more the great pilgrimage up North. The head had entered Northampton while the tail still meandered near Grafton. It entered Northampton on 22nd July, the Court commandeering Sir Thomas Griffin's home, and immediately settled down to business : the Queen to sit in her apartments amongst the ladies, the King to lounge solemnly at the council table, to listen with as much patience as he could assume to the long orations of greeting from the Mayor and Aldermen and clergy, and to pounce on whatever gifts of money or food that could be twisted out of the loyal, cheering citizens.

Culpeper found to his annoyance that he was still lodged with Paston and Charles Howard, this time in slightly better quarters, in a merchant's house.

Paston and Culpeper avoided each other, but for a moment they found themselves alone together while Howard went to wait upon his sister, the Queen—and Lady Margaret Douglas.

"Tom, you mustn't think so bad of me," said Paston suddenly, conscience-struck. "I didn't mean what you think, at all."

"Was she as sweet as she looked ?" sneered Culpeper. "Cautious, Paz ! the ugliest ones are the safest, for they've been least man-handled. What drab are you going to choose here ? I saw a broken-nosed doxy on a stile not a mile out of town. She

was as mad as Maudlin, and wrung her hair as if she screwed water out of it. She dribbled at the chops. Why not take her, Paz darling?"

"If you persist in keeping up this quarrel . . ." began Paston, but he did not finish.

Culpeper had gone, whistling, from the room.

Paston was ashamed of himself, but what else could he do? If Culpeper was really in love with the Queen, every friend of his would probably be screwed on the rack. Oh, Culpeper was a fool, a dangerous lunatic!

To the devil with him!

THE weather was brilliant now, real spring weather, warm and delicious. It was enough to make a man drunk. Here, in the country, the very earth smelt appetising, the singing of birds brought thoughts of love. And Tom Culpeper wandered, friendless and mad with dreams—wandered alone through the spring weather, dreaming of a girl who was Queen of all England.

There was no work to be done during a progress, there was scarcely any necessity to wait upon the King; everything in the Court was topsy-turvy. The other gallants found sport in prinking and bedizening themselves before the saucer-eyes of wenches who had never seen so many blindingly handsome men together in all their lives before. Wherever the progress went, it left depleted purses amongst the townsmen, it left them well-nigh foodless and wineless, but in exchange it gave a crop of babies to be harvested in the next year. Many a country troth-plight was broken as the progress moved North, and poor country boys drank all their wages and gripped the ale-pots with shaking, murderous fingers as their doxies wandered coyly in dark lanes with supercilious, perfumed gentlemen.

"You mustn't go out at night," said Will Sommers,

gripping Mr. Harman's shoulder as that gentleman strolled into the street to breathe some fresh, moonlit air. "There's no place for a man to walk without being cursed for catching his foot in somebody's leg."

"Yes," said Mr. Harman, "it is sweet to see lovers in the moonshine."

"Sweet!" almost howled Will Sommers. "You are getting old, man! Have you forgotten our pact? These aren't lovers. These are whoremongers having their delight on poor simpletons. These are the ravishers who should be stoned at the gate. They think it gentlemanly, something to boast of, to depucelle some poor wretch and thus ruin her in the eyes of the youth she should have married. Call it sweet—sweet! Tom Harman! Sweet it is when lovers steal out timidly together in the moonlight and, pack-a-pack, plight the troth that later they'll bind at God's altar. But this is different."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Mr. Harman solemnly, stroking his beard.

They reached Pipewell by the 24th. At every town he came to, Henry went hunting, and Culpeper began to find solace in the sport. It was not the time for hunting, but Henry didn't care; he was on holiday. The grease season, when deer were fat or in grease, lasted from 24th June to 14th September, and fermisons, the time for hunting the doe, did not start until 11th November. Nevertheless, Henry went hunting. His leg these days was too painful to permit him to do too much violent exercise, and he had the animals impaled. It galled him to stay inactive. He had been a powerful youth, a cunning hunter, a brilliant archer; so strong had been his long legs that at jumping no man in England could have equalled him, with or without a pole, and so mighty was his arm that he could fight with a two-handed sword in

one hand. At all games, knightly or simple, he had been unsurpassed; even Cornish wrestlers were thrown in his kingly arms; jousting had been his favourite exercise, the steel armour seeming as light as tin to him.

Now he must rely mainly on his skill at archery when hunting. The beasts—deer and stags—were beaten by the village lads into enclosures; a dais was erected for the women and men to sit and stand on.

When Kate heard that Culpeper went hunting, she developed a sudden lust for archery, and the King gave her the prettiest gilt bow she had ever seen. She rode on a horse-chair to the enclosure, and with her ladies all chirping excitedly, she mounted the dais with its wooden railing. Before her was the wooden net thick with frightened beasts, crying dolefully and shaking great horns at the sky. The huntsmen stood near by, holding back the hounds.

The King and his men were on horseback, circling round with bows and arrows ready, some clutching spears. Culpeper looked up, and the sun dazzled him; he could not be sure that he saw aright as the women in bright reds and greens and yellows came pacing over. Then shaking his head, and raising his hand above his eyes, he saw Kate with a green, pearl-twisted, French hood over her dark red hair, her young body in a green-and-white gown, in honour of the King. He heard her laugh as her Master of the Horse helped her to alight.

Then the trumpets blared, the gates were down, and the animals rushed forth, eager to escape to the forest. Even then, Culpeper could not forget that Kate was watching. He felt that he must do great deeds because her glance was upon him. Never before had he shot so swiftly and so well; the deer fell to the earth, bellowing, kicking; the dogs were unleashed, they darted forward to the kill, leaping at the deer's

throats, snapping at the tendons in their legs, ripping open their bellies so that bowels and guts fell to the grass in a torrent of blood; stags trumpeted with agony and rage as the arrows struck their fiercely-beating hearts. All was confusion, excitement. Men darted here and there, slipping on the blood, horses struggled to get a foothold in the muck; men with spears and daggers upraised, slit throats, stabbed at large brown eyes. The air was thick with arrows as if with a shower of solid rain; laughing like a boy, the King forgot his leg. He shouted, all were shouting, men jubilant, mad with the lust of killing, dogs barking, the beasts snorting and screaming in their pain. Hundreds of dead, as after a great battle, blood everywhere, the stink of fresh blood in the clean spring sunlight, the stink of blood and sweat.

A recheat. The trumpets sounded. A giant stag had bounded off, unscathed, into the forest. They could not let him live, he must not live, that splendid antlered creature. The King had forgotten the pain in his leg. His horse drawn back on its haunches, he shouted at the gentlemen to follow him to the chase until they caught the stag at soil, at bay; then they were off, helter-skelter, dogs baying, the huntsman winding his horn triumphantly; ladies and all were forgotten in the blood excitement of the hunt.

Culpeper stood irresolute. He heard the wail of the horn in the distance, the shouts of the men, the bellowing of the hounds. Why should he follow? why shouldn't he linger here? He might speak to Kate. There were but few men left to watch. But he dared not speak to her. If he spoke, God knew what words would come, words irreclaimable and dangerous.

He dug the spurs into his jennet and galloped off.

Kate bent the gilt bow in her hands as he went. Did he no longer love her that he ran like that? She

gazed around at the hundreds of dead and dying beasts in the great red lake of their own blood, and shuddered.

"Come, ladies," she said bitterly, "let us return. The King and his merry men have found better quarry to hunt than us poor women."

Did he no longer love her? The question beat inside Kate's temples. She could not shake it out. Nothing could conquer that insistent cry, as continual as her own heart-beat. It was her heart-beat. At every knock of the heart in her breast—Did he love her? Did he love her? Was he a liar like all other men? Did he love her, this Tom Culpeper? What proof had she? The gabble of a drunken man crying for her to marry him; his whispered entreaties on her first day as Queen; a note slipped into her hand at a dance; a dozen kisses squeezed into a minute's embrace; mayhap, he was drunk each time. How could she know?

She never saw him. He never came to her Presence Chamber in the morning when other men called to show their respect and strutted before the women, showing off their clothes and whiskers. Each day she looked in vain for him, for his dear, clean-shaven face. Why did he never come? Charles would appear, to giggle with Lady Margaret in a corner, and to press her dimpled hand; Sir William Parr, escaped from his lewd, many-lovered wife, Lady Anne, would slink in, his projecting, monkeyish jaw quivering as he gazed with his pale eyes spellbound upon haughty Mrs. Bray. Where was Culpeper? His friend, Tom Paston, wandered airily in now and then to see his sweetheart, that hypocritical, mean creature of a Mrs. Garnyshe, who owed everybody money and talked about them behind their backs.

But he never brought Tom Culpeper with him.

From Pipewell to Liddington, in Rutlandshire, went the progress, and the Queen lolled, sick at heart, in her litter, jolted and bruised. She heard the horse's hoofs squelching in the marshy road, heard the whoas of the litter-men, the creaking of the poles as the horse slipped. Men shouted ahead of her, she heard men laughing near by. But she kept her curtains hooked together as if she were a sultana in the East who dared not look with naked face upon strange men. What was the good of looking?—she wouldn't see Tom Culpeper.

"I feel ill!" she cried to Kath Tylney, when she was locked up in the Bishop of Lincoln's manor-house at Liddington like any other part of the baggage, and the spies were all around her again. "Why doesn't Lady Jane come to see me?"

Kath Tylney explained patiently that Lady Jane was unwell, she had a slight cold.

"Perhaps," said Kate, a sudden gleam of hope turning her grey-blue eyes to azure, "perhaps the Queen might call upon her lady, seeing that she is ill!"

They were in the small room that had been converted into her Presence Chamber. On the walls had been painted her coat of arms, and she gazed bitterly at it, she didn't really know what it meant. But under her coat of arms was a small table with a writing-desk on top of it.

"I'll write," she murmured. Then turned to Tylney. "You may go," she said with dignity.

Hurriedly, she pulled the gilt stool from under the table, opened the desk with its damascened top, and took the pen in one hand, dipped it in the ink-pot, and remained in that position for an hour, slowly sucking the plume to rags.

Writing was not easy to Katharine Howard. She had to think seriously about each word before she

wrote it, and the more she thought about it, the less correct the word sounded. Spelling was something that only great men, like Kings and poets and secretaries, could comprehend. How did one spell words that one had never seen written? And Kate had never read anything since the days of her horn-book, not even her prayers or even Tyndale's English Bible that Cranmer and Cromwell had had such difficulty to make the King sanction without letting the King know that it was the work of his greatest enemy. No, Kate had never read the Bible; she had had only one lover-letter in all her life, and that was the one Culpeper had slipped into her hand at the dance.

As she scrawled the words, her little pink tongue came out and writhed with each movement of her pen; she shut one eye; she scratched her head; she leaned her cheek on her arm as if exhausted; she sighed and she raised her faint, curving brows and wet her lips; but like St. George with the dragon, again and again she returned to the fight, determined not to give in. The letters straggled up and down, higgledy-piggledy, now small, now swelling out like blown-up bladders, growing larger until the sheet wasn't wide enough to hold them. Her small hand twisted with the letters as if they were blood squeezed from her finger-tips. She would never sneer at poets again after this. No wonder they were so proud of their poems! Now, Culpeper could not doubt her love: it was the first letter she had ever written and, she swore, it would be the last.

Amazingly enough, it actually read quite well when she glanced proudly through it afterwards; but then, she knew nothing whatever about spelling, and, of course, knew what the hieroglyphs stood for.

This is what she read over to herself, smiling complacently at her own prowess in creating such a

wonderful thing out of pen, ink, paper, and her own head :

Master Culpeper,—

I heartily recommend me unto you, praying you to send me word how that you do.

I did hear that ye were sick [This was a lie : she hoped that he had been sick ; he should have been sick, not having seen her for so long ; sick unto death, he should have been !] *and I never longed for anything so much as to see you.*

It maketh my heart to die when I do think that I cannot always be in your company.

Come to me when Lady Rochford be here, for then I shall be best at leisure to be at your commandment.

I do thank you that you have promised to be good to that poor fellow my man, for when he is gone there be none I dare trust to send to you. I pray you to give me a horse for my man, for I have much ado to get one, and therefore I pray send me one by him ; and in so doing I am as I said before ; and thus I take my leave of you, trusting to see you shortly again.

And I would you were with me now that you might see what pain I take in writing to you.

Yours as long as life endures,

Katharine.

One thing I had forgotten, and that is to speak to my man. Entreat my man to tarry here with me still, for he says whatsoever you behyw he will do it.

Yes ! she had covered everything there ! For a moment she considered scratching out the word *behyw* and replacing it with *order*, as a more common word, then decided that *behyw* looked more important. What else was there for her to say ? It wasn't too strong a letter, or not too unmaidenly, yet it was loving enough. He couldn't expect her to be too passionate, as yet.

And that hint about Lady Jane should show him the way to enter her chamber. He could talk to Lady Jane without suspicion. It wouldn't harm Jane's reputation if people thought she had a lover. She wasn't Queen of England and France.

And Cotes? Kate was worried about Roger Cotes, although he hadn't spoken to her for weeks. But he had been drinking heavily, and in his eyes when he glanced at her, there had been a look of contempt, perplexing and frightening. Kath Tylney had told her that he was dangerous. Tylney had met him once in the garden at Pipewell, and he had grappled her like a lover; but when she saw his face, she knew that it was not love but hatred that he felt. And he had sworn roughly, called Kate vile names and said he'd leave her. "I go," he said, "because all rats flee the dying ship." He had mumbled about a horse. He needed a horse badly. He demanded a horse. (So Tylney told Kate.) He had cursed Culpeper, although not by name, calling him that Queen-wench's fellow, luckily, for then Tylney had not been let into the secret. Kate trusted Tylney, for they had known each other for many years, Tylney having been a chamberer in the Dowager's palace at Lambeth, and was some kind of distant relation; trust her though she did, Kate preferred that she didn't know about Culpeper. So luckily, Cotes had contented himself by damning an anonymous admirer, and Tylney had thought it only drunken ravings. "I'll not stay for her," he had told Tylney (so Tylney had told Kate) "but for him," he said: "if he stays, I stay. But I must hear it from the mouth that has kissed hers." Altogether, he had behaved most peculiarly, and Kate could not understand why. She had done nothing to the man—nothing that she knew of, anyhow. He might even be dangerous. . . . Perhaps she had better tell Lady Jane to send another

messenger. Then, remembering that Cotes could not read, she sat down to add another sentence to her letter, warning Culpeper to beware of him.

She had screwed out no more than the word *and* when quick steps behind her made her quickly fold the letter as if she had just finished writing it. She glanced up and saw the dark, questioning eyes of the chamberer, Marget Morton, fixed upon her.

Very briskly, humming to herself, Kate folded the letter and waxed it. Then she pressed her ring into the hot wax, leaving the imprint of two lions fighting, the lions of Scotland and of Howard.

"Ah, Marget," she said merrily, "I was about to call you. Take this to my Lady Rochford at once. Don't dawdle, now. She's not well and I've written a few words of friendship to her."

Morton took the letter suspiciously.

"It's got no superscription," she said.

"It doesn't need one. You know where to take it to, don't you? My hand's cramped from writing."

"No message, your grace?"

"No. . . . Yes. Wait a minute. Tell her to forgive my hand, and I am sorry I can write no better. Now be off with you."

She sat back, sighing, contented. He could not ignore that. This would bring things to a finality. She felt as if she had suffered from some illness and was suddenly cured. She had never felt so light-hearted for years. She was a girl again.

Soon Morton returned, and Kate, with large, innocent eyes, asked her: "Did she say anything, Marge?"

"Yes, your grace. She said you'd have your answer in the morning."

"So soon? Well, that's a merry answer! She can't be very ill if she expects to be whole so soon."

"To see me? somebody to see me?" Culpeper had so long forgotten that anybody existed except Kate and himself that he could not credit it when the chamberlain at the inn at which he was lodged came into his room where, for the time, he was fortunately alone.

"Send him up."

It was Roger Cotes. At first, Culpeper did not recognise the man. When last he had seen him, Cotes had been young and clean-looking; now he was thin, his golden beard uncombed, his eyes dark from drinking. But it was Cotes, and Cotes meant——

"You have a letter for me?" Culpeper cried, darting from his chair.

Insolently staring Culpeper in the eyes, Cotes drew Kate's letter out of his wide red velvet breeches and brushed from it some grains of the bran that padded the cloth. It was crumpled and soiled by his dirty hands, but the seal was unbroken. Culpeper seized it like a hungry dog, and with trembling hands he opened it without breaking the seal. He looked first for the name, and it seemed—so sudden, so glorious was the shock of surprise—that the sight of the word *Katheryn* dragged him up from the earth by the hair, and dizzied him. He smiled and did not know he smiled as he glanced hurriedly through it, noting the emotion of the letter although he did not read the words, taking from the insensate paper some fragrance that her fingers had left behind on its crinkled surface. *She* had touched it! There, her pen had caught and spluttered! and her dear hand had pressed, just there!

Slowly he read the letter. It was not an easy task. The sentences began regularly enough, spelled more or less well, but her fingers must have ached as she went on, for the words became almost foreign in their unfamiliarity, and there was strange talk of "her

man." That must mean this fellow here, Roger Cotes. It said that he, Culpeper, had been good to "her man." What did she mean? He had never spoken to him since at Greenwich. "*I pray you to gyve me a horses for my man, for I hya muche a do to gat one, and thefor I pray sende me one by hym; and yn so doyng I am as I sade afor; and thus I take my leve of yow, trustng to se you sorttele a gane, and I wode you war wythe me now that you moutte se wat pane I take yn wryteg to you. Yours as long as lyffe endures. Katheryn.*" He managed that all right, and he would give the fellow his horse. But now the letter became almost incomprehensible, and for a few minutes he sat with puckered brows deciphering the jumble: "*One thyng I had for gotton, and that hys to speke to my man. In tret my man to tare here vytt me stell, for he sas wat so mever you behyw he vel do et and.*"

Curiously, so strange is the heart of a lover, the quaint spelling, the childish construction of the sentences, added a charm. Culpeper loved their very simplicity; somehow it made Kate more beautiful, more desirable. It brought back those old days of babyhood when he and she had played together at Holingborne, plucking wild strawberries, her mouth stained with purple blackberry-juice. He could remember that stained mouth very vividly—dark, as if bruised with over-kissing.

She was still that child, so poignantly innocent despite her passion. She was the kind of woman who is outwardly unaffected by the violence of her own desires. Strong as those desires were, they left no shadow in her eyes. Nothing could destroy her childishness.

And this letter! He raised it reverently to kiss, then suddenly he remembered that he was not alone, and he turned swiftly to see Roger Cotes grinning at him, almost sneering.

"You know what's in this letter? No, of course

you couldn't." Culpeper with a great effort forced himself to talk of common things. "There are parts in it," he said, "that I can't understand. That you might explain. It says here that I've been kind to you. Why! I've scarcely ever spoken to you!"

Cotes shifted from one leg to the other. "I want a horse," he mumbled.

"You'll get your horse. But, come, what does this mean—this saying I've been good to you? and this: that you won't stay with your mistress unless I command you to?"

"I don't know." Cotes cleared his throat, his mouth opened, his eyes took on the empty glaze of a man striving to remember half-forgotten things. Why had he said that? In the garden that night he had gripped Tylney and words had rushed from him, words he scarcely understood. But he had been so tortured, so wild with desire for his mistress whom he had loved so many years . . . nobody would ever understand the hell he'd lived in. During the old days at the Dowager Duchess's he hadn't suffered like this, although, God knows, there had been cause enough then for suffering; but now she was definitely unattainable, and had therefore grown even more desirable. Seeing Culpeper leap into the gallery that night at Richmond had suddenly flung upon him the realisation that she was another man's, that actually a man—not a King—could possess her. He hadn't realised that before. He had never believed the tales that that rat Manox told about her.

Why had he said Culpeper was kind to him? He didn't know why. But he wished to show the nobility of man to that bawd Kath Tylney; he had felt maudlin. Look how kind we men are to each other, Culpeper likes me, her lover likes me, he's kind to me, you women don't understand how noble men are! That's what he had meant.

"I don't know," he muttered miserably. "I felt that if you told me to stay, I'd stay, not because I love you, but I felt . . . Well, why hide the words? That if her lover bade me stay, on his own head would fall the weight of my rage!"

"But even now I don't understand . . ."

"How can I tell you? For God's sake, sir, give me that horse!"

"You'll get your horse."

"At once. I want it now. For your sake, I beg it of you. O God, sir, if you could see my heart! I don't know what's happened to me! One moment I hate you, the next I love you. I want to embrace you, I want to twist your neck. Get me that horse. Please." He stepped forward, and Culpeper saw to his horror that the man was weeping. "Don't you understand, sir, that I live in hell, knowing that she's yours! I told her you'd been kind to me. I told her maid, Tylney, that spaniel-whore. I wanted to reach her heart through you. To make her say: 'He's kind to Roger, I too must be kind to Roger!' Ah, for pity's sake, sir, that horse!"

"You're going to leave her now?"

"For her sake, for your sake, for my own sake, I'm going to leave her. I'm afraid of what I'll do. Last night I was drunk, I said—dog that I am—I said that I could have married her if I'd wished. To a whole taproom of strangers, I said that."

"What!" Culpeper was on his feet, furious. "You cur!"

"Don't be angry, please, sir, or I might lose my temper. Get me that horse."

Culpeper stood very still, and suddenly the anger left him. Poor devil. He looked sick. He had suffered.

"You do love her," he said gently. "Come, I'll get you that horse. . . ."

Into the late afternoon Roger Cotes rode from Lidding-ton. Culpeper was never to see him again in life, nor was Kate. He rode out of their lives, and was gone as definitely as if he had ridden into another world.

Poor devil, thought Culpeper. A shred of quick flesh caught in the wheel of Fate's car, crushed by the senseless hoofs of the oxen plodding on to their inevit-able end. Broken on the wheel. Cotes would never be the same man again, and all because of a girl's young beauty that he had desired and could never attain.

It was not until Culpeper was back in his room that he realised that by sending Cotes away he had broken his link with Kate. How could he pass this letter to her? She had mentioned Lady Rochford, and perhaps he could send it to her, and she could give it to Kate?

Writing was not much easier to Culpeper than it was for Kate, but he contented himself with a brief statement of his love for her and asking for an inter-view as soon as possible. It was enough. He swiftly folded the paper, dropped red wax on it, and sealed it with his thumb: he dared not use his ring lest it be recognised, and a thumb-mark was untraceable. Any curious person could look and be no wiser unless he read what was written within.

Now for the messenger. He flung open the window of his room that faced the front of the inn, overlooking the yard, and by great good luck his servant, Johnny Hubbard, was there with a crowd of other serving-lads and wenches, roaring with laughter at some tumblers and jugglers.

At one end of the yard they had upended six barrels and placed some boards upon them, and here a sort of play was being performed, the rooms of the

inn being used for tiring-rooms. It was a very crude comedy performed by some strolling players—for the progress had brought in its wake all London's cut-purses, beggars, and players—they chanted lines at each other and knocked each other over, and were continually falling off the stage into the yard. Amongst the players were some gipsy girls, contorting themselves, twisting their legs round their necks and walking on their hands, whirling round on their heads, their lithe bodies half-naked, and seeming more naked by the continual grinning of their brilliant white teeth.

"Johnny! Johnny!" shouted Culpeper.

The noise down there was so great that he had to shout again and again before his servant heard and came running upstairs.

"I have a message for you, John," said Culpeper, gazing shrewdly at the man. Could he trust him? He had known him almost all his life, but could he trust him with so great a secret? "You are a faithful lad, John," he said.

Hubbard smiled complacently and fumbled with his dagger. "I try to be, sir," he said. "Me and Alred and Master Paston's lads did our best to prove it against the grinning thief in Southwark who spoke ill of you."

"I remember. But can I trust you?"

"With your life, sir."

"This is not my life. Though, perhaps it is, for it is my love. Do you know the Lady Jane Rochford, George Boleyn's widow?"

Hubbard's round face showed his disappointment. He had expected his master to choose a prettier mistress than that skinny jade.

"Yes, sir, I know her face. I've seen her."

"You must give her this letter and make sure that it goes to her. It must not on any account go astray. On your life, I warn you to be careful. It is a bad

hour to call, for it grows late and your visit might arouse talk; but we must risk that. Be as careful as you can. Come straight back to me here, but first wait for a reply."

Hubbard took the letter, unbuttoned his jerkin, and pushed it inside, against his shirt.

"I'll be as swift as legs can fly, sir," he said.

WITHIN an hour he was back. The message was brief, but it gave Culpeper great happiness. Hubbard was to call before dinner to-morrow for his answer.

"You can go," said Culpeper.

It was dark now, the sun was setting in the west, bursting like a crushed carcanet, spilling its rich essences of red and purple against heavy drifting clouds. Culpeper could see it from his window, and it gave him a feeling of almost godlike peace. There was such colour in the sky that the earth seemed sodden with beauty, seemed caught in a mist of darting colours as if it moved within a fiery opal. There could be no evil, he felt, in a world that held such loveliness.

"Kate," he whispered, "Kate, my Kate . . ."

Above him the clouds wandered gently, the sheep of God, glowing with the tints of paradise, drifting in a sea of unimagined loveliness. So peaceful everything was! There was laughter in the yard below him, the clatter of dancing feet, the bird-like singing of a fool, the obscene gestures of dancing wantons with provocative posturings and eyes that glittered with libidinous suggestions; but that was in the mud of earth.

As darkness closed in overhead, swinging the black shadows forward, the men below fondled their girls more openly, gripping them tighter, as the strollers' mummery brought lusts to the surface of drunken minds. Morals were always loose during a progress.

The Queen could scarcely wait through Mass next morning before she sent Morton off to Lady Rochford, and her ladies and maids watched her curiously as she paced about the chamber. Then came the answer. She looked at it, saw the whorls of his thumb upon the wax, and longed to put it to her lips. But she was watched from every side.

Carelessly, as if it were all too unimportant to worry about, she turned her back on the women as she broke the seal and read again and again those words that came from him who was wholly hers. She could scarcely read them, she was so excited. If only she were alone and could read them properly! "*I ake to kyss yor lyppes so swete and softe*," he wrote. Dear words, dear words of love!

Slyly she looked around and saw that she was watched from every side. She could not burn it, she could not bear to burn it, yet she dared not keep it.

With sudden strength, strength she did not know that she possessed, Kate took the tongs and pushed the letter into the flames of the small fire that glimmered under the great mantelshelf that was painted with Bishop Russel's arms—for she had insisted on a fire while her cold still clung to her.

And she felt as if with that burning, she burned a part of herself, a part that was lost for ever and would always be missed.

Every night after supper, at six o'clock, Sir Thomas Henneage, Chief Gentleman of the King's Privy Chamber, called at the Queen's apartments to see how she felt and to tell her of the King's health and pleasure, warning her if the King was calling that night or if he wished her to go to him. Henry was usually too lazy to call on her, and she was forced to go to his chambers. Kate detested that. All the fuss of the maids and gentlewomen, their lascivious

pleasure in washing and dressing her, as if she were some completely impersonal toy that they played with, gave her a feeling of deep revulsion. Why couldn't Kings and Queens be like ordinary people? Must they even parade their private affairs before the whole Court?

She went to the King, guarded as if she might be attacked on the way; the gentlemen ushers and yeomen and pages bowed her in. . . . It was better when the King came to her, men weren't embarrassed by things like that.

She might lie in his arms all night, but Kate did not consider the King's embraces as love-making. They were a duty that must be borne with sweet patience, and it never entered her little head that Culpeper might be jealous. Henry, to her, was so old; she liked him very much, he was kind to her and he made her laugh with his jests and his funny tales; but he was not a lover. He mimicked the antics of a lover, but she submitted like some pagan devotee who unclasped her arms to the priest because religion bade her to. It wasn't love, it wasn't pleasure, it wasn't even degrading for her, it was an entirely sexless affair. She submitted as she submitted to being washed at night and to having her hair washed in wine and cleansed with lavender-water, to having her food sliced small by the carver, to having her clothes put on her, her shoes laced . . . it was an act without significance, merely a boring necessity.

Every evening at six o'clock, after the surnape and dishes had been taken from the supper-table, and the women lounged about with glazed eyes like over-fed puppies, waiting for the spiced foods to be absorbed, Sir Thomas Henneage always arrived with news of the King; but this evening in the Bishop's manor-house at Liddington, the 1st August 1541, instead of Sir Thomas, the King himself arrived and stood blinking

at the door, smiling as all the women darted from chair and stool and cushion to flop down in homage, suffering acute pain as the whalebone of skirt and doublet dug into tight, full stomachs.

With the King was Will Sommers. Sommers was dressed brightly to-day in purple doublet and striped hose, long, pointed, old-fashioned shoes, and great iron spectacles on his nose. He mimicked every gesture of the ladies and gentlewomen, then as Henry hobbled towards the Queen, Sommers darted ahead of him and raised her gently from her courtesy.

"Ah, Harry," said he with an explosive sigh, "it's only at nighttime that I'd change places with you."

"You saucy rogue!" laughed Henry. "Out of my way! Kate does not like such villainous jests."

"It's you that jest, not me!" cried Sommers, darting around behind the King and whispering loudly into his ear. "Such a rose, Harry—the Union Rose and the Thornless Rose, what buds they should bear together! How can the dungheap love the rose, he can only lie down under its roots and rot there happily, as I do."

"She is indeed sweet," said Henry. He tolerated from Sommers what he would tolerate from no one else, for he loved the man; the jester was the only friend he had, the only man he could trust, because he wanted nothing but good deeds from him. So deep was his love for Sommers that he kept no other fools around him, save Patch and Sexton, two harmless idiots, for Sommers was very jealous of rivals. He had once treated a big-bodied, big-voiced, black-haired jester of Henry's most abominably, almost blinding him with hot broth, then breaking his skull when the man was imprisoned after drawing a dagger in his rage. So Henry kept no rivals for Sommers, and let him speak his mind to the full, even about the Queen.

"Come, man," said Henry, "are you dumb with

gazing on her beauty? Where is your wit? It is brisk enough usually."

"Ay, 'tis a good wit. It'd serve to make a wiser man than you a fool, methinks. But I cannot jest when I see so sweet a rose as this of yours, Harry man. I can only think—Harry, if we could but change our nightgowns for an hour! Go, Harry, sleep with the spaniels, as I have often done for lack of better warmth!"

"The jest's gone far enough!" cried Henry. Why did the fool harp on it? She was his! no man, not even Sommers, must ever think of her in such a way—in a nightgown.

"By God, William, you go too far!" he cried.

"Why, Squire Harry, no man would dare to pluck the rose that's twined about the English oak. . . ."

Henry raised his stick, his face growing dark; Kate paled: why this insistence on the plucking of the rose?

But Sommers well knew how to avoid a beating, how to turn anger into laughter. He was suddenly the fool, darting about with his spectacles and pretending to be an owl, hiding behind the arras and kicking, poking out his head and making antic faces. . . .

Within a minute the King was laughing until the tears came to his eyes. Sommers was one of those men who, with one gesture, can hold a whole room spellbound in ecstatic merriment. It was a gift that words can give no idea of. It was his amazing personality more than any particular act that so delighted people.

And when he had them at the right pitch of exhaustion, and the women held their stomachs, laughter curdling the food and drink they had guzzled, he ran quickly away, ran out of the chamber like his own monkey, scratching himself as if he had fleas under his doublet.

"By God, whenever I think of killing the man," groaned Henry, "he tries to kill me with his antics! Yet he presumes too far. One day he'll fail to make me laugh." He was serious suddenly, frowning. "He is the only man in England who doesn't fear me," he muttered. "Perhaps that's why I love him so."

"He meant no harm," said Kate. "I think he's kind and gentle underneath."

"But no one's so kind and gentle as my Kate!" Henry caught her by the chin and kissed her forehead. "You have brought more goodness out of me than any of my councillors, except Will, who has a generous heart and pouches all my money that he can to give the poor. But you, my little chubby wolf, are even kinder than he. Do you remember how on the barge that day you begged for Wyatt's life?"

"What would be the use of my kindness," said Kate, "if the King hadn't the kindness of heart to grant my boons? Poor Wyatt. I couldn't let the man die. Why, I sing a few of his songs!"

"Yes, a fine poet, the finest alive, finest since Chaucer. Surrey's no comparison to him. I hope he keeps to his wife as he swore he would when I pardoned him; Tom treated her badly."

"There shows your kindness greater than mine! I thought only of the man who made my songs, you remembered the wife and made him swear an oath to return to her."

"And not only Wyatt! You sent clothes to the old Countess in the Tower because she was cold. You have the kindest heart of any in all England!"

"Except your grace."

"Little flatterer!" He moved heavily towards the chair and sat down slowly, gingerly, for his leg was very bad to-day. "Play me something of Wyatt's," he begged. "I love his verse and I love

your voice. Wyatt's verse and your voice; play while I sit and watch."

The virginal-cover was lifted and propped up, the velvet-covered stool placed ready, and Kate sat gracefully down, and ran her fingers carelessly along the scales a moment, recalling the delicate tune. Then gently she began, and the instrument's low, sweet tone lulled Henry while he sat in the shadows. He watched and listened, blinking and smiling, loving every gesture she made, until her warm young voice throbbed with the words made magical by Sir Thomas Wyatt:

"*The knot which first my heart did strain,*
When that your servant I became,
Doth bind me still for to remain
Always your own as now I am;
And if you find that I do feign
With just judgment myself I damn
To have disdain.

If other thought in me do grow
But still to love you steadfastly,
If that the proof do not well show
That I am yours assuredly,
Let ever wealth turn me to woe
And you to be continually
My chiefest foe.

If in my love there be one spot
Of false deceit or doubleness,
Or if I mind to slip this knot
By want of faith and steadfastness,
Let all my service be forgot,
And when I would have chief redress
Esteem me not. . . ."

There was silence after the last note died in the air, a silence more flattering than any applause could be;

music and words had brought dreams to life and given them body.

"You play beautifully, Kate," said Henry at last. "Who taught you?"

She shrugged. "A lad," she said as casually as she could, and looked aside. "I think his name was Manox."

"Manox?" said the King. "I know that name."

She said quickly: "Is there nothing else I can play you? Any favourite song of your grace's?"

The King looked actually bashful for a moment. "Do you know that little thing of mine," he asked in a most casual voice—"the one that runs:

As the holly groweth green and never changeth hue,
So am I—ever have been—unto my lady true . . .?"

He flushed. "I'd like you to sing that to me," he muttered. "Although I didn't know it at the time, those words were really written to you."

Of course Kate knew it. Kate was a loyal girl. She had hurriedly learned it—with all Henry's other songs—at Gardiner's promptings, the moment that Henry had first glanced amorously upon her.

"DANGER, man, danger! I smell danger, menace in the sky and unknown terrors around the corner!"

Mr. Thomas Harman, in his little room, dropped the devotional book he had been reading, as those words were hissed into his ear; he looked, shuddering, over his shoulder, and gazed into the leathery face of Will Sommers: no laughter now in those hollow eyes, no smiles in the heavy creases about the lips; he seemed a demon in the candlelight.

He darted round to face Mr. Harman, leaned forward and whispered, his eyes roving about the walls as if in search of hidden listeners:

"Danger, man, danger, and you sit reading books! I've shivers in my spine as if a caterpillar crawled up my back. I've been following, listening, seeking for that Purpose. I've seen a giant who cannot bear a jest that touches the petals of a thornless rose, I've seen a thornless rose whose petals lost all colour, turned quite grey at the whisper of behind-door kisses. I've seen a certain serving-man with a certain badge upon his arm, the badge of a pepper-man, and he waits continually with messages upon a sick lady who once in a crowded court-room stood up and killed her husband with black lies. Oh, there is danger, danger, danger hammering on these walls, and no man listens, no man hears but I, a jester, who laughs because he fears to weep!"

With shaking hands Mr. Harman laid down the calf-bound book. "You exaggerate," he said, "you cannot mean——?"

"See if I exaggerate! Why aren't I blind like all of you! I tell you, heads will fall and Tower Green will grow dark with a wanton's blood. Men'll have their bodies screwed inches longer and their bowels tossed hot from their bellies before their popping eyes! How can men walk blindly on and not feel death's knuckles fondling their throats! Men—and women too! Danger, Harman, danger! I am afraid, afraid!"

He gripped Mr. Harman by the sleeve and snuggled up against him, staring into his eyes and shivering.

Mr. Harman stared back at him, fearfully. He could never tell whether Sommers was jesting or serious. Yet now, gazing into those dark eyes, he felt that indeed there was danger in the air. Suddenly the place seemed silent, menacingly silent, as with the stagnant hush before a thunderstorm. He gazed over his shoulder, half-expecting to see the foul fiend glaring at him; but all was as usual. The world, he felt, had paused its spin, it hung in torturing suspense for one

flash of time, and he waited for the lurch when life would be flung off its balance.

He was a madman, this Sommers—with a gesture, a look, he could make a man believe anything.

Mr. Harman struggled to regain his sanity.

"There's nothing wrong," he said with dry lips, to reassure himself.

"You have forgotten our search!" cried Sommers. "Our search after God's purpose. I haven't forgotten, and I am warning you, Mr. Harman—wake up, wake up, for the torments of hell are coming upon us here! And all because a rose can hide its thorns! It doesn't realise that it pricks your finger, it feels no pain. Ah, God, how can you make a rose understand the desire a man feels to pluck it and kill it? Its own beauty destroys it. But when this rose falls, thorns or no thorns, I tell you, Mr. Harman, it will drag half the garden with it!"

PART THREE

CHAPTER NINE

Lincoln

SEVEN MILES FROM LINCOLN, at Temple Brewer, the cortège stopped. It was very warm, and the men and women itched for a cool bath; their clothes were heavy and stuck to their bodies. But Culpeper did not mind the heat, he minded nothing now that every minute drew him closer to the time when he would hold Kate in his arms, for she had sent a message, a message of one word—*Lincoln*. And they were very near to Lincoln now. He did not know how he had lived those days since she had written that word at Liddington.

The progress had crawled on to Colly Weston, to the Manor there built by Henry's grandmother, Margaret, Countess of Derby; from Colly Weston they went to the Duke of Suffolk's manor of Grimsthorpe that had been almost completely rebuilt to house Henry and Kate. Suffolk was Henry's oldest friend and had married Henry's beloved sister, the jolly, narrow-faced Mary Tudor, the widow of King Henry of France. She had married Suffolk—then Charles Brandon—without asking Henry, and had refused to leave France until Henry forgave them both, which he soon did, although the marriage destroyed many of his political dreams, for Mary should have married at least a prince; but Henry could bear no malice against his lovely sister and his dearest friend, the fighting

Brandon: he welcomed them back and gave them much honour. But Mary was dead now, and it was a young girl, Katharine Willoughby, who rode out beside Suffolk to greet the King and Queen when they neared Grimsthorpe: she was a pretty wench, Kate Willoughby, and made Suffolk's fourth wife. She had a smiling, well-formed mouth, high forehead, and heavily lidded eyes under faint, thin brows. The two Kates became swift friends, and when the Queen Kate was shown over the house, she gazed eagerly along the low gallery and examined the fine newel stairs in the west wing, to see if Culpeper could steal in; but there was no way for him to steal in. They must wait till Lincoln.

Lincoln at last! Fate's oxen had travelled slowly enough, but they had reached the end at last, the end of waiting, but the beginning of great happiness. Where would it lead him? Will Sommers would have been interested to hear that Culpeper did not care where Fate dragged him to. If the gallows had waited outside her window, he would still have crept in to see her. Death meant nothing, for life meant so much to him; against the high ecstasy of life, death was a little, an infinitesimal thing.

Yet he chafed at the delay. The King would dine before he entered Lincoln, and the men were pulling up the bell-shaped tents, each tent topped with a vane coloured with the arms of the knight who lodged there; over Henry's tent, St. George fought the dragon; over Kate's tent was her red rose.

The men leaped from their horses, the ladies were helped out of litters and from horse-chairs and side-saddles. The musicians struck up a merry tune, and a trumpet was blown to call them all to dinner. The King and Queen did not eat together: he stayed with his gentlemen and she with her women. It did

not take the cooks long to prepare the food, for kitchens were swiftly erected and the meat was mainly salted.

Culpeper ate at a mess with twelve others, including Paston, but they never spoke to each other nowadays. It was presided over by Sir Thomas Henneage, who sat in the centre, the others sitting on each side of him, six a side, so that they could be served from the front, the carver standing opposite Sir Thomas. Culpeper, tense with waiting, tingled in every muscle of his body, like an athlete ready for sport, but he did not join in the laughter and merry talk. He ate sparingly, for food and wine no longer had any real fascination for him. And after dinner he sat apart from the others on a canvas-topped stool, gazing at the hot sky, at the hills of rich green, so brightly emerald in colour that they seemed some kind of sugar-meat ; at the trees quivering with young leaves. He sat in the sunlight, the blue velvet cap that Kate had given him at Greenwich pulled forward over his eyes as if it were a live thing, Kate's small familiar, that bent down to listen to its master's heart-beats, to see the thoughts in his blue eyes, to catch whatever whisper parted his lips.

Like the mountain coming to Mahomet, Lincoln trooped out to meet its King where he squatted with his tents, seven miles away. The Mayor, the burgesses, and the commoners put on their brightest, newest clothes, polished the buttons of doublets and the scabbards of swords that had never seen the sunlight. They trooped down in solemn ranks, as also did the gentlemen and yeomen of Lindsey, and the Archdeacon, dean, and clergy of the great Minster ; they came, bright and clean, joggling on horseback, tramping on foot, to pay reverence (and money) to their King.

The pageantry bored Culpeper. He had seen it so

often, and all he thought of now was the passing of time. Every minute he blessed for passing.

The Archdeacon and clergy read a proposition in Latin and gave the King baskets and packages of food; then they hurried back to the Minster to make all ready.

Culpeper formed up with the other gentlemen as the King and Queen rode to their tents to change their clothes. She passed so close to him on her horse that he could have touched her toes below the crimson gown. She was dressed all in crimson, seated on side-saddle, all in crimson from cap to velvet shoes, only the jewels broke the colour as of blood, the jewels and the gold chain about her throat. She pretended not to see Culpeper where he stood with head uncovered, ready to drop on one knee as she came closer. He tried not to look at her, but as well ask the hawk not to look at the partridge when the hood is flung off and it darts into the sky; he felt that he would swoon if he did not look at her.

Jauntily she sat her horse; he could see the little feet in slashed velvet shoes resting on the straight metal stirrup, he could see her instep in red hose, for the shoes did not cover more than the rim of her feet, being strapped to the ankle. With her hands in red gloves puffed at the joints, rings over the gloves, she held the useless silk reins, for her horse was led by a henchman in crimson clothes. Her head was up, the bright blue eyes turned misty in the glare, her dark mouth curling from the small teeth.

Behind her came her Master of Horse leading the Horses of Estate; and beside her rode the King, her husband, garbed all in woodman's green. He looked a giant, a King indeed, with his golden beard threaded with white, his green cap pulled forward over his close-cropped skull.

SOMEHOW, Culpeper passed the time until they came

again from their tents. He wished he could change places for a moment with her Master of Horse when he knelt to lift her on to the saddle and held out the rectangular stirrup for her feet to press against. Just to feel the weight of her body on his palm would have been ecstasy just then to Culpeper, so excited was he by anticipation. Long absence, long dreaming, had turned Kate into something that was not human, that was, perhaps, ultra-human. She was very much alive to him, but to her his dreams had given something that transfused the clay with magic, that turned her woman-flesh into the flesh of a goddess.

She was clothed now in cloth-of-silver, only her hair being dark, her hair and her mouth and the long curved eyelashes. She was as silvery as a fish, her dress glinted like liquid steel at every movement, the sunlight rippling on it, flaring here and there so that it dazzled him, blinded him, as if indeed she were a goddess that human eyes could not look upon.

Next to her, the King, in cloth-of-gold, leaped nimbly into his saddle; but the gold looked heavy, seemed sombre against the magical ripple of silver cloth.

Would all this stupid business never end? Would night never come? Nobody hurried. You would have thought that this was a common afternoon, instead of being the herald of unspeakable delight, to see the way they all loitered and talked casually together, actually laughing! The sun seemed to Culpeper to be pinned immovably on the heavens, the horses ambled, the people talked and whispered as they had done a thousand times, and in the same dull voices. There was Charles Howard in the inevitable brown suit, patterned with black lace and guarded with crimson, his hat with a yellow plume; there was lean Paston, looking slyly aside from Culpeper, stooping to pat his horse's neck: he was garbed in

shades of yellow like autumn-leaves ; Culpeper himself had on a cherry-coloured doublet, red-brown breeches, red stockings, and a red jerkin with long hanging sleeves lined with fur. He had forgotten the heat when he put it on in the cool morning, but now it grew uncomfortable, and his high-collared shirt itched on his skin so that he continually twisted his neck to loosen it.

He tapped his horse on the side and kicked it gently as the progress started, and, with Charles Howard beside him, he passed along the road to Lincoln.

The progress had at last reached Lincoln.

First strode the heralds in their shining tabards, with their trumpets blazing in the sunlight ; then the gentlemen-pensioners with gilt battle-axes over their shoulders, the gold Tudor rose on their backs ; then came the jovial giant, King Henry VIII. Before him walked Lord Hastings with the Sword of State, and Henry sat astride his charger as if there were no such thing as a sore leg in all the world. One hand on hip, he smiled upon his subjects, the gold plume in his golden cap shaking above his golden head. Then came his horse, led by Sir Anthony Browne, and after Sir Anthony, the Children of Honour in cloth-of-gold and crimson velvet, looking very tiny and elfish on their gigantic coursers ; then the Earl of Rutland, and after the Earl, the Queen, Queen Katharine, smiling in her glittering silver clothes, sunlit and sparkling, her dark red hair plaited under a silver cap. She was followed by her Horse of Estate, the Horse was followed by her ladies, gathered around Princess Mary with her short-sighted eyes peering under colourless brows ; her frightened, awkward manner of holding the reins made her look out of place amongst these merry, grinning, self-assured ladies and gentlewomen.

At last, out of the mighty Minster they came, every-

body happy to escape, the solemn, magnificent *Te Deum* still ringing in their ears. Into the sunlight stepped the King and Queen, the narrow streets being blocked with people wedged down the perilously steep hill. Kate smiled and wrinkled her eyes and nose as the people huzzaed and flung their caps into the air. A way had been cleared through the mob, for Henry had decided to give the citizens another glimpse of his magnificence, instead of stepping out of the cathedral close straight into the Bishop's palace as he could easily have done. Guards stood gripping their spears in two hands pressed against their stomachs to hold the mob back more easily. Kate mounted her horse and, smiling, bowing on either side, rode the few yards to the palace beside her King.

She saw Culpeper gazing at her, but pretended that she did not know him, a pretence somewhat marred by the flush of recognition that crept into her cheeks.

He watched her pass, then tried to push his way through the crowd to be still close to her, but that was impossible. Such was the effect of this moment upon him, of the cheering and the flags and the sunlight—this man, who could have seen her every morning in her Presence Chamber had he dared face her, now struggled like any commoner to keep in step with her horse.

The ladies-in-waiting were close behind her, and he caught Lady Jane Rochford's eye fixed speculatively upon him. She nodded slightly and smiled her cold smile.

Had that nod meant that he would see Kate to-night?

Culpeper found from the harbingers that he was lodged at the Green Dragon Inn, at the south-east of the city. It was towards the bottom of the hill, close to the old Grey Friars and the old Norman tower.

From his window at the back he could glimpse St. Swithin's Church and the rippling silver of the river Witham. But he wanted to look the opposite way, up the great hill towards the glorious Minster, next to which Kate was lodged in Bishop Longland's palace.

Here, in his stuffy room, shared now by Charles Howard alone, he waited to hear from Kate, not daring to go out and view the town lest Hubbard return with a note and he not there to read it; for Hubbard was waiting on Lady Jane.

No rack could be such agony as was this waiting, waiting, and he dared not really believe that it was Hubbard coming when he heard the man's quick step upon the stairs.

He tore the note out of Hubbard's hands and wrenched it open.

"*To-night at eleven,*" he read. "*The little turret-door in the Hall near the pantry next to the porch. Till then, all your Katharine.*"

He gazed at it, unbelieving. It was a trick, it wasn't true! It wasn't possible! At the last moment, he felt sure, something would happen to frustrate it. To-night at eleven! Was paradise as close as all that?

SUDDENLY there was no pleasure left in life for Culpeper. He was horribly afraid. There was only fear in the world.

He turned to his cupboard, took down the jar of wine there and smelt it. In him was an almost overmastering desire to get drunk, for when drunk he would dare anything. It was the coward's way, it was treachery. How could he go to her drunk? And he realised what horror would settle on him to-morrow morning if he called upon her drunk to-night.

He put the jar aside and waited for the darkness that it seemed would never come. If only he were a finer

man, a braver man ! . . . if only he were worthy of her ! She risked all this for him—her throne, her life. Ah, she would wake from her dream when she saw him again. She would know him for the clown that he was.

Fearfully, yet with a terrible hunger, he waited for the night.

Ah, God ! ah, God ! . . .

He could not keep still, and at last put on Kate's blue cap, strode down the stairs and fought his way through the taproom, down the rickety wooden steps into the mob in the yard. It took five minutes for him to crawl and elbow his way into the cobbled street, so great was the press of thirsty men. And in the street he was not much better off. Everybody had come out to see the town, even the townsmen themselves, and of course, their women.

Henchmen running before some lord, hitting with staves, shouting "Make way ! make way !" ; the bells of beggars, whining of cripples lurching along and being jammed against the walls ; cut-purses busy on every side ; soldiers off duty, burgonets in their hands, spears under their arms, as they wiped the sweat from their heads and shuffled and strove to scratch themselves in their heavy plates of steel ; a passing gallant, bored with waiting for a break in the crowd, spurred his horse and made it kick : there were howls and shrieks, a child with a bloody head ran whimpering into a house, and a woman, white with flour, came from her kitchen to shake an angry fist at the street.

Such a mob, so many voices ! townswomen trying to talk mincingly like city dames and sounding catlike, making Culpeper shudder ; men glowering and dragging their women on their arms, mumbling to themselves. Every window was crowded ; the old wooden houses seemed ready to fall forward with their

weight of flesh ; flags and tapestries were hung out from every roof-top. Shop-stalls were pushed over by the throng, cloths and foods were stolen by the handfuls, somebody smashed a window and whooped with delight. .

It was suffocating, and the talk was deafening—a steady hum of sound, of clogs on the cobbles, of voices and laughter and shouting ; people tripped in the gutter in the middle of the road, fell on the rubbish-heaps outside doors ; never was there such uproar in quiet old Lincoln.

Up the hill went Culpeper, pushed and knocked. He held his purse firmly in his left hand and gripped his sword-hilt with his right : then he felt safe.

With the progress had come every whore and thief from London, it seemed ; so many drunken people *en masse* Culpeper had never seen in his life. Women and men, flushed, spewing, shouting ribaldries, singing songs, cajoling strangers to enter taverns. Shop signs were pulled down. It was havoc, it was madness.

At last Culpeper escaped, stole down beside the wharves where the shipping floated serenely in the stream, ready to sail to Boston. He stole into the fields, and sat upon a stile, smoothing down his clothes and knocking his cap back into shape, trying to mend his broken plume.

Would the night never, never come ?

KATE, too, waited for the night. In the Bishop's Palace, to the south of the Minster, she walked the room that was her Presence Chamber, waiting for the night. As at every house she came to now, the minute on arrival she had examined the palace for a means of Culpeper's entering. To the amazement of her ladies, she had herself sought out the backstairs.

The Great Chamber over the Hall had been curtained off with tapestries into two rooms, one for

Kate's bedroom, the other for her Presence Chamber: it was perfectly situated for her ends. The stairs next to the porch wound up to her bedroom, and also to another chamber directly over the porch that she had presented Lady Jane with, to the resentment of all the other ladies, who were given smaller rooms.

Kate had planned everything. Lady Jane was to plead illness and to stay in her chamber; but how was Kate to wriggle out of hers? Her chamberers slept in the adjoining chamber, separated from her bedroom only by the tapestries sagging on tight ropes; they could (and did, save when the King was there) wander to her bedside at all hours; and the fat night-light burning placidly in its bowl of water was always on the little ledge to show if the bed was tenanted or not.

It was no use trying to escape the problem. Let the wretches suspect! let them talk! They dared not talk too much for their own sakes—witnesses often suffered as much as the principals in affairs of treason, such as this would be called. Curse the women, they'd chatter amongst themselves and pull long faces. Let them, and be damned to them.

Why couldn't she be left alone? Why must they pry with their solemn faces into her affairs, as if they'd be shocked to hear the most modest oath and had all been bred in nunneries? She knew their tricks. That perky-nosed, tow-headed Lovekin, what right had she to talk? And Kath Tylney had not been exactly a godly wench in the old days! And as for Marget Morton—well, a girl didn't get a floppy figure like that if she hadn't seen the stars over a man's broad shoulder fairly often. What right had they to watch her and jangle about her with lowered voices like good women discussing a harlot?

When was night coming?

Waiting . . . waiting. . . . Always she seemed to be waiting!

If the King called for her to-night, or came to her here, what would she do? It would be terrible. She waited in the most fearful suspense until six o'clock, when Sir Thomas Henneage had called, as usual, and had told her that the King was tired and thinking of retiring alone to All Night, as his sleep was officially called.

Even then she was not safe. Often he came unexpectedly. If he chose to-night . . . .!

Ah, dear God, pity a poor maid who knows not where to turn!

SLOWLY, very slowly, the sun went in the west, went in a sunset of great alpine clouds, tinged with violets and greens and purples and yellows like a gigantic butterfly-wing fluttering overhead and shaking off its delicate coloured dust. It fluttered over earth, while the black night crawled up laboriously with its stars and its moon like a crust of sugar. Slowly the landscape died before the creeping night. The houses of Lincoln, clinging to the steep hill, became vague, lost their hard edges, and seemed to dissolve into a purple ocean, the trees like lost ghosts waving misty cloaks through the gloom.

Culpeper watched the moon rise as he sat on a stile outside the city limits; Kate could not see the moon from her window, but she saw the flowers in the terrace slowly disappear like candles gently snuffed, and the tall wall of the close tumble down with black shadows.

She bathed and let the chamberers perfume and dress her. To-night she did not mind being pulled about like a toy. Let them play with her, decorate her, perfume her—they did not know for whom they worked to make her more beautiful. She smiled to think of how they would have yelped and shrieked if they had known her thoughts.

"No," she said, "no. I won't go to bed. What time is it?"

"Not ten, your grace."

"Not ten!" She seemed to have lived a thousand years since the evening. "I don't feel like bed, not just yet," she murmured, as they wrapped her scarlet nightgown about her with its edging of warm fur, too warm for so hot a night as this, in August. Yet she did not protest, for the marten-fur made a lovely frame for her chin.

"Let's sit by the window in the cool, and talk," she said

They yawned and grimaced behind her back. Kath Tylney rolled up the bed-stockings on to Kate's long white legs and slipped her little feet into velvet slippers.

"It grows late, your grace," she said.

"If you're tired, go to bed all of you! I'll rest here."

"You know, your grace, we can't rest until you're asleep. We'll sit beside your bed and read till you doze off."

Sly Mrs. Lovekin! that was so typical of you!

"Yes," said Kate, "read to me. But I am not going to bed."

WAITING, and the moonlight coming through the window, the stars outside like silver eyes winking, twinkling; Lovekin's flat voice intoned a devotional book on how maidens should behave:

"*Hadst thou found such a fair*
As was fair as Absolon,
And also as strong to tear
As was mighty Samson,
So rich also and as rare
And as wise as Solomon,
Take him therefore for thy leman. . . .

But man's love, my child, thoult find
It gloweth but a little show
And with guile it is entwined,
It is fickle, false—all woe ;
When thou thinkst it is confined
It wends away as the winds blow,
And it comes thy limbs to bind,
It isn't love, for it's thy foe . . ."

On and on went Lovekin's voice, dully pointing out the evil of man's love in comparison with Christ's great peace of the spirit. Kate knew that that was true. But not every woman had the vocation, had the power of entering that peace : besides, all the nunneries were being pulled down to-day. . . .

. . . Oh, what thoughts of a lover clambering through the open window, breaking the creeper-stalks as he steals in . . . what dreams and hopes, and what fears ! . . .

CHAPTER TEN

Night of all Nights

KATE FELT THAT SHE COULD BEAR THAT VOICE NO LONGER. She wriggled in her chair, picked at the ring on her first finger—the ring the King had given her and had had engraved inside the words, *The Rose without a Thorn*—she pouted with boredom, fidgeted, sucked in her heavy under-lip between the little teeth. That voice, that awful voice of Lovekin's, on it droned :

" *There is no thing He loveth more*
Than maidenhood. To win Him nigh
Learn thou never that old lore
Through which maidenhood will die
That's never recovered with moan or sigh,
But you that keepeth it secretly
Though all the gold of Araby,
Ruby rings from an Eastern mart,
All the treasures of Tartary,
Were taken tight in thy belly,
To weld, to have for thy young heart,
Turn you must, turn lovingly,
To clean maidenhood . . ."

" Stop ! stop ! " cried Kate. " I'm tired of words, words ! What is the time ? "

Not yet eleven . . .

" I think I'll see how my Lady Rochford does," said Kate, rising and yawning most unconvincingly.

" But she'd be abed now. It's gone past ten." Marget Morton glanced amazedly at the other

chamberers, wondering what could be the cause of this sudden love for Lady Rochford's company. "Come now, your grace! you must be tired."

"I am not tired. Surely I know how I feel better than you! I'll go alone if you're too slug-a-bed to light me."

Without a word, Tylney took a candle from the table, and Morton, with a sullen look of rage, took another candle from the mantelshelf.

"I won't be long," said Kate airily to the others; "please don't wait up for me."

None answered. They bowed as she went out, but they were puzzled and very curious.

Kate walked out like a queen, with her head in air, the nightgown doubled up so that it wouldn't drag on the floor, hunched up over her breast and held there with both hands. It was far too big for her and made her look tinier even than she was.

Tylney went ahead to light the way, Morton followed. Kate did not look at either of them, she walked on under the gentle radiance of the candle that shone on her reddish-brown hair as if she were a saint in a painting.

Over the narrow passage-way, past the dark stairs, and thus to Lady Jane's chamber.

At the door Kate turned to her attendants. "You may go now," she said with dignity. Then she opened the door and entered, carefully shutting it after her, leaving the two women to stare into each other's eyes, asking unspoken questions that neither dared answer.

Morton had only the vaguest suspicions to work on; she was luckier than Tylney, for Tylney had known Kate Howard before she became Queen of England.

LADY JANE had dismissed her attendants, and now stood against the open window, breathing the night air and gazing up at the moon. She had lit only one

candle, and this had been placed on a small round table in the very centre of the room, its yellow light wavering with black shadows on the walls as if it were a conflict between the flame and the night, both battling together at every flicker of wind through the casements.

"You're early," said the Lady Jane. She was in her yellow nightgown, buttoned up to the throat. When she moved, the cloth purred about her like an animal. "It's not near eleven yet."

"I couldn't wait another minute. I hated every tick of the clock. I thought those girls'd drive me mad!" cried Kate breathlessly, then added, child-like: "Do I look very beautiful?"

"Come here," said Lady Jane quietly; and when Kate stood beside her, she put her hand under the little chin and lifted Kate's face into the moonlight. The soft radiance gave a luminosity to the flesh, made the eyes glitter wetly, and the mouth to seem fuller, softer.

"Answer me truly," said Lady Jane: "I do believe you love this man!"

"Why," said Kate, "of course I do."

Lady Jane's finger-nails pinched into her skin suddenly.

"You fool!" said Lady Jane. "You little fool! I never guessed. I must be getting old. I never thought . . . my God, you little fool!"

"What do you mean? You don't think I'd meet him like this if I didn't love him, do you? What on earth do you think I am?"

"I never thought you'd dare to see him if you really loved him. You must be mad. What have you tricked me into? I should have guessed. How was I stupid enough not to guess? And all this while you've been slyly loving him, making me a bawd! What a fool I was! what a fool!" Lady Jane turned

abruptly away. It seemed inexplicable to her now why she hadn't guessed before, but they had rarely been alone together, and had been able only to discuss the subject in whispers, hurriedly. She had forgotten that girls were born fools and that they learnt sense only by hard experience; she had forgotten all about love, never having loved. She felt suddenly very old. For this she had struggled and schemed. . . . How was it she hadn't known? She should have known at once; such a simpleton as Kate was sure to do the silliest thing, like falling in love.

"What did you think I was seeing him for?" asked Kate, puzzled and shocked. What did one meet a man for at night if one did not love him? Only bad girls did that. "I thought you knew."

"It's too late now. When the pitcher's broken I can't mend it. I can only pray for the best, pray that you'll learn sense."

"But please, Jane, what have I done?" Kate caught her by the arm and dragged her round, the dress murmuring with a curious menace as if warning her against something. "Tell me, Jane: why shouldn't I love him? why should I come here if I didn't love him?"

"I'd have thought Nan Bullen would have been lesson enough. Don't you girls ever learn? Do you realise, you little fool, that every man and every woman in this palace is ready to listen, to tell on you? It'll mean death if you're caught, your head chopped off. Mine, too! What'll your maids think? A girl is half-mad when she's in love; she's reckless and gives everything away without thinking."

The more Lady Jane thought about it, the more agitated she became, and the more outrageous seemed Kate's behaviour. But what could she do? It would be absurd to stop now just when everything was arranged so nicely. Perhaps she could get Cul-

peper murdered? But then a girl in love would be even worse if her lover died: in her despair she'd blab everything. And if she drew out and let Kate carry things on on her own account, she'd be dragged in just the same, and Kate would do something preposterous. She was so stupid. Falling in love! She had no right to fall in love! men were to be used by Queens, not loved by them. At any rate, love didn't last, thank God! Kate'd soon have her fill of this Mr. Culpeper.

"Don't look at me like that, Jane, like a corpse, as if you'd gone to sleep! You frighten me!" Kate pushed her friend to wake her out of her thoughts. Sudden terror came over her. Not until this moment had she really understood the enormity of her act, the fearful dangers ahead. "Speak to me, Jane! Tell me—what have I done?"

"You've fallen in love," said Lady Jane suddenly, with a grim smile. "A common act of females, but one, thank heavens, that I'm not prone to."

"But I've loved him all the while. Why else should I meet him? I don't understand."

"And I thought we were such cunning stateswomen!" said Lady Jane bitterly, speaking half to herself. "I thought we could play with great affairs and defeat man at every turn. I forgot that women carry a snake in their bosoms, this thing called love. Will we never learn, as men have learned, to use this love for our own ends and not let it destroy us! We were both fools, I for thinking you were clever, and you—you because you were born a fool, I suppose: letting yourself be dominated by this, this love! What will it lead you to? The block, to death. And all because you fall in love. I suppose it's really rather funny. I thought you were clever, that all you wanted was to make your throne secure; instead of that, you want to kick it from underneath you. Why did you become Queen if all your ambitions end in—lovers, lovers that

can be picked up by any drab. I thought this man was only a pawn in the game, something to be used for a night and then forgotten."

"You thought—you thought I only wanted Master Culpeper so that I could cheat Harry with a son!" Kate started back, horrified. It was terrible, to have love degraded like that! Once, when she was younger, she might have understood this cruel attitude better, but now, with this great love burning up every second of the day and night with longings, painting each thing about her with the memory of vanished kisses, now such a thought was blasphemy.

"You are a naughty woman!" she cried, "a vile woman!" There were tears in her eyes as she spoke; she rubbed the back of her hand across her mouth as if to wipe away some vile thing. "I can't believe it of you, even yet!"

"Well, we're both disappointed, because for the first time we see each other!" Lady Jane laughed wearily. "Your little boy will soon be singing for you. Hadn't you better unlock the door for him? I'll leave you here together, and even you, surely, won't be stupid enough to leave the door unbolted!"

"Won't you come down with me?" The thought of those dark stairs frightened Kate.

"I suppose I'd better," said Lady Jane, shrugging her thin shoulders, "or you'll probably mew loud enough to him for all the Court to hear."

She took the candle from the table, and as she raised it, the black shadows rushed up the wall towards the roof.

Fearfully, Kate followed her. No longer was the night peaceful and beautiful; something horrible, something evil had crept into the moonlight, like Satan into the garden; and the slimy feel of its presence was on her very skin.

The night seemed to hide a menace, and she

shuddered as she followed Lady Jane's lean figure down the curving stairs, the yellow nightgown rustling and whispering before her like the voice of the fiend to Eve, sibilant as a snake in brushwood, murmuring amorously and drawing her down the well of stairs into some obscene trap.

Death seemed to close above her as she crept down, as she hugged the wall ; and only that peaceful candle, peaceful and undisturbed like the love of God, shone on the roof with undiminished light.

The key—it had been oiled by Lady Jane—slid in the lock without a sound.

"Now," said Lady Jane, her face, lit up from below by the candle, looking disembodied as if it hung in space, suspended by her long black hair. "Now there is no turning back ; from this night, unless you can strangle that traitorous love of yours and learn sense, your end is as inevitable as the puffing out of this light."

They were back in Lady Jane's chamber now, and Kate put both hands to her cheeks and wailed :

"No, no, don't put it out now, please. . . . Oh, I was so happy ! What has changed you suddenly ? "

"You," said Lady Jane, and set the candle on the little table.

"Why are you so cruel ? " said Kate pitifully. "I didn't believe them when they told me that you'd behaved wickedly to your husband and had sworn his life away, saying that he was carnal with his own sister. I see now that they were right."

"Quite right," said Lady Jane. "He treated me like a dog, filthily. I am no spaniel-whore to be satisfied with the shadow of another woman's love. I don't know if he loved his sister, I don't care. He was bad enough for anything and deserved to die."

She paused and frowned, thinking of those upstart

Boleyns, Anne and George, and the insolent way they had treated her.

"Well," she said suddenly, with a weary smile, "I'll leave you now to your turtle. Don't forget to lock the door and shut the windows. You won't need the light, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, please."

Lady Jane paused with a contemptuous smile, her mouth was puckered into a round black hole as she leaned over the candle.

"I thought lovers were never afraid of the dark," she said, drawing back, "like thieves and whores. I learn more every minute this night."

Without another word she strode out, leaving Kate alone with the candle and the moon as the only bulwarks against the overlapping darkness that slid along the walls with every puff of wind.

And the night was oppressive with unknown terrors. The beauty of her love was plucked away like the petals from a flower; it was as if marriage-bells had turned their jolly song into the haunting despair of the funeral hymn. All colour was gone from the earth, and the jewel she had held so jealously, the jewel that was her heart, had become something petty and very dangerous. So suddenly had the beauty vanished! No longer was she the enchanted princess in her brass tower waiting for the golden prince to clamber to her on the strands of her hair; she was only a girl waiting for her leman, a frightened little girl who watched the candle spluttering in its grease, her eyes wide open, the pupils dilated—a girl and her leman. . . . The glamour had gone, leaving her as clay, uninspired and heavy, a creature that a man would fondle but could not love. She was not beautiful; she was a wench, a woman of dull flesh, a wife sneaking from her husband into an ugly affair, an adulteress, petty and lustful and wholly shameful.

Outside she heard the watch come close, walking as quietly as they could so as not to disturb any sleepers. She heard the snarling of the torch, the clatter of steel, men's heavy breathing. That did not frighten her. She felt safer to know that humanity was so close.

The steps continued past the door and descended the staircase. On the landing below, they stopped to pass out of the door, and she heard them whispering.

What were they muttering about?

The sense of sudden real danger from outside roused Kate out of her stupor. She crept cat-like to the door, silently, dared to open it a little and listen.

She heard one man say: "Some wench sliding out to see her lad, I suppose."

Another laughed under his breath. She heard him loosen the strap under his chin that held down the cheek-plates. "Whew," he said; "it's hot. This horsehair lining swops up the sweat and makes steam. It's not worth reporting. Let the wench grow claws if she wants to get back. Serve her right, the slut."

The door closed, was pulled to firmly, and she heard the key being pulled out of the lock.

They had taken the key! they had locked the door! And it must be near eleven now! The fear of Culpeper being caught drove everything else out of her mind. She forgot her shame, she tingled with dread, and caught her breath at knowing that she was cheated of her love. No longer was she the clay-imprisoned wench waiting for her simple lover; divinity rushed upon her again, she was the Queen of England waiting for her Launcelot. She was conqueringly beautiful, and she would not be outwitted by men-at-arms, by crude, earthly soldiers.

She waited until silence had stolen over the palace again, and then crept gently down the narrow curving staircase. It was not until she was on the landing facing the door that she realised that she had forgotten

to bring the candle with her. But the darkness was now a lesser terror. Her hands trembling, she fumbled with the lock, rubbing her palm over the cold iron ; yes, they had taken the key !

Like a frightened bird, she darted around that landing. She was trapped. Forgotten were all vague future fears, all shames ; she was a woman cheated ; and she would not be cheated. But what could she do ? She tried to push her finger into the lock. What was the use of that? She leaned her face against the wall, and wept.

She slid to the floor, sobbing ; fate had beaten her. There was no more that she could do, there was nothing at all to do ; she had tried her best, but fate had cheated her.

WRAPPED in his black velvet cloak, with the hood drawn over his head, Culpeper passed the guards at the Porter's Lodge, for they knew him well and did not doubt that he called with a message for some lord. He passed through the porch into the Great Hall. The remains of a fire still showed against the darkness in the centre of the floor, and a torch burnt fitfully at its last ebb in a bracket against the nearest of the great marble pillars that seemed to dissolve into the blackness of the high hidden roof. It was strangely like being inside Christ Church in London, and Culpeper felt as if he committed blasphemy by being here on such an errand.

His serving-man, John Hubbard, plucked him by the long hanging sleeve and said in a hoarse whisper :

" It's the sou'-west little door near the pantry ye wanted, wasn't it, sir ? "

" Ay, near the pantry ! " Culpeper swung round to his right, and there saw the narrow, arched doorway in the corner. " That must be it," he said.

Now that the dreamt-of moment was at hand, he felt calm. It was always thus ; waiting was the

worst; once the danger was there to be faced, he became steady, and amazingly calm. He had brought no lanthorn with him, but the dying torch and the fire in the pit revealed the door clearly, the keyhole a black mark like a dab of charcoal.

Quietly, he put his shoulder against the door, and pushed. It did not move.

Kate heard the wood creak and crept up closer, listening.

She heard Culpeper say: "It's locked. We must have come to the wrong door."

"It can't be," said another male voice. "There's the pantry, sir, and that door next to it is the passage that goes through the larder into the kitchen."

"Surely she hasn't cheated me!" Culpeper's voice was harsh. "My God, if it's a hoax . . ."

"No, no!" Kate beat with her little hands on the woodwork; she put her mouth to the keyhole—ice-cold the iron against her lips—and whispered, "Master Culpeper, Master Culpeper, I am here."

He stood unmoving as that beloved voice came to him suddenly like the whisper of a goddess out of the sky. Then he was on his knees, his mouth on the other side of the keyhole, drinking her breath.

"It is you, my love?" he whispered.

"It is I, your Kate," she answered.

"My Kate . . ."

"Not with this door between us." With futile hands she beat upon the impassive wood; the sound came to him like the fluttering of a bird's wings against caging bars.

"So close, ah, love," he whispered, "and I cannot touch you!"

The laugh caught in her throat as she answered bitterly, "All our life there'll be something between us, wood or a man. Ah, my love, why is life so cruel, so cruel!"

"And love so bitter!" He pressed closer against the door as if he might feel her body's warmth through the wood. "I've dreamed and dreamed of to-night . . . and there's a door between us! 'Love will find out the way!' . . . in poems! This wood can't feel us, it doesn't know what it's doing, yet it holds us apart."

"I think I will die," she said wearily, "if I don't hold you in my arms very, very soon."

"Let us die! Let us beat in the door so that they'll all hear, and die in each other's arms!"

"I won't die until I've loved you. . . ."

They snuggled against each side of the door, sighing and whispering, warm breaths mingling through that iron hole. Ah, the inadequacy of love when mere wood could hold it apart!

Culpeper felt a hand on his shoulder, and gazed up, startled, as if he had awoken suddenly from profound sleep; he saw Hubbard gazing down at him with an embarrassed grin.

"Pardon me, sir," he whispered, "but if it's only a bit of a lock between you and your lady, talking through a keyhole won't help much. A wire does better work."

"You can open it?"

"I can try."

"Darling, darling," cried Culpeper excitedly, "he's going to open it, in a minute, wait a minute!"

He darted to his feet and pushed Hubbard down on his knees, the man grinning and apologising for his genius.

"It does look bad, sir," he muttered; "I must admit: me saying I can open doors like a wizard, but I never hooked anything in my life, sir -nothing more, anyhow, than what maids won't miss for the giving of. I only learned it to get into the maids' parlours at houses; some mistresses lock up their maids as if they was plate, and they can't get out all night. I've known one house where they had iron bars over the winders, not to keep 'em good, sir, but just so's they won't be

up at night and too sleepy to work in the mornings." As he gabbled on, he took the plume from his cap and slowly untwisted the soft feather from the supporting wire. "It ain't always sure," he said; "depends on how tough the lock is. But if you never try, you'll never get in. No harm in having a try. A door can only refuse to budge, and a woman can't do no more than slap your face. . . ."

Culpeper did not listen. He stood up, shivering with excitement. Hubbard's leisurely manner filled him with raging impotence. It seemed absurd that his love should depend upon the ability of a serving-man with a piece of wire.

She was behind that door, waiting for him . . . and suddenly the thought filled him with terror. Almost, he hoped that Hubbard would fail. All his old fears swooped upon him and numbed him. Like a mortal waiting for some awesome revelation, he alternately dreaded and longed for the miracle.

His tongue between his teeth, his eyes screwed up, Hubbard played the wire into the lock, twisting it, turning it now this way, now that, listening for the click that would tell him that the bolt had jumped back.

On the other side of the door, Kate heard him as she bunched herself up against the wall. She held her breath, not daring to hope. And in the darkness she prayed with a fervour that God had never heard from her before. This last barrier had made the idea of not seeing Culpeper something too terrible to be borne. If she did not see him now, after all this waiting, she felt quite sure that she would die, that she would crawl off like a sick dog into a corner and would slowly die of utter despair and spiritual exhaustion. If they were not released, her emotions would burst their shackles like a caged beast inside her and would conquer and kill her. They would tear her to pieces. She would go mad. Her brain could not stand such torture.

Apart, yet so very close, the lovers waited on this hot August night, a door between them, and only a coarse serving-man capable of bringing them together with a trick he had learned so that he might fondle greasy kitchen-maids. Common love was of use after all, if it could open the door to this love that was more than love, that had by its suspense and unrealisation something gigantic about it, something almost divine and something very, very pathetic.

In the still night a sudden click, and Johnny Hubbard sat back on his haunches, smirking. With one hand he pushed the door gently, and it knocked against Kate, who sprang quickly on to the stairs. Culpeper watched, amazed, only half-believing, like a sceptic who sees a miracle before his eyes.

It moved ! actually, it moved !

"One of the easiest locks I've ever found," said Hubbard complacently.

Again he pushed the door, and it swung slowly open, letting the faint light from the hall pierce the darkness of the turret ; and the light fell upon Kate standing on the stairs. Her eyes looked enormous ; her hair, parted in the middle and strained back from the high forehead, had been brushed and tied carelessly at the nape of the neck in two loose plaits, so that now one plait fell over her shoulder like a reddish snake.

Hubbard and Culpeper both stood entranced at seeing her, watching her slowly revealed to them by the opening door. So like a miracle it seemed. As the light soaked through the darkness, she gradually appeared and shone there ; and all three gazed silently at each other, she at Culpeper, and the two men at her.

"Christ help me !" said Hubbard, and crossed himself. "The Queen !"

Now that they had met at last, both seemed paralysed ;

they could not as yet fully realise that they faced each other, that this was not a new trick of the gods.

Hubbard scrambled to his feet. Culpeper did not see the terror on the man's face, the unbelieving terror of one who looks on a ghost. Hubbard did not look back; he ran with all the speed his long legs were capable of, out of the porch and into the open skyey terrace.

Culpeper never saw him again.

But what were the things of earth to such a moment? Let the whole world desert him, he did not care. He stepped slowly towards her, shyly.

"Kate," he murmured.

"My love," she said.

Then he was in her arms, at last. . . .

The King's wife with her leman . . . they were not the first. Had not Launcelot ridden in one hot day to the drowsy town of Camelot, and there torn his Guinevere from the stake? had he not broken iron bars with his naked hands to reach her? And Tristram with the small Iseult, had they not loved and died for love?

In Lady Jane's quiet room, watched by the silent furniture, moonlight sending its delicate tendrils to twine in Kate's unbound red hair, the lovers lay on the straw and rushes. There was a deep silence in the room, as if even the furniture and the walls watched scandalised and afraid of the calamity that this love must breed.

There was no happy end possible to them; they must live on stolen kisses, they must dream alone and meet like thieves in the darkness. For thieves they were, filching another man's embraces; thieves and traitors to the realm of England.

Not so very far away from Lady Jane's apartments, in this great palace of Bishop Longland's, the King lay in his bed, sleeping; Lady Jane in her bedroom, brooded, afraid; in the Queen's ante-chamber, the

maids whispered on their pallets . . . over the whole palace there seemed a feeling of quiet terror, squeezing the air and making it dry and difficult to breathe. The floors creaked as if the planks twitched fretfully together, and a little wind rustled the hangings like the sobbing of ghosts.

And dazed, sitting up in the moonlight, as if suddenly awakened from a dream, the lovers gazed into each other's eyes. Like swimmers risen from underneath the sea, drinking in the sweet fresh air, they looked upon each other and touched each other with hands that shook, still afraid to believe that it was real, that they were not phantoms of their own desire.

"You are Kate?" he whispered. "You look so beautiful."

"I am your Kate, a cate made only for you and spiced with sweets only for your mouth." Her jest was lame, but there was such tender love in her eyes that it sounded as good as any of Will Sommers's. She swung back the wet hair from her face, and raised herself on one arm to gaze at him with eyes smudged with tears. "All yours. If only I was all yours! If we could only marry!"

"Don't say that. Couldn't we wed? Why not tell the King that we'd plighted our troth before he saw you?"

"How could we explain? It's too late, too late. If only he'd die!"

"Hush! that's treason."

"I don't care what it is. I don't want him to die, because he's so kind to me, but I don't care what happens as long as we're together. I'd do anything to be your wife—anything. It isn't fair. Ah, God, pity me. Why did we miss each other?"

"I asked you," he said reproachfully, "but you only laughed at me."

"Why did you come drunk? How could I trust you?" She pulled a strand of her long hair round

and pressed it into her mouth, biting it. "Ah, God," she said, "we can't keep on like this."

"They can only kill us." But even as he spoke, a cold tremor ran over his body: they could do much more than merely kill him, they could torture him, and they would. . . .

"I don't want to die," she cried, "not now when I've found you. And I won't give you up, I won't. We mustn't be caught . . . not yet. You go to Confession, don't you? Remember that the King is head of the Church now, whatsoever you shrive yourself of will go back to him. You won't tell about me, will you?"

"No, madam!" he laughed, "I warrant you that! Sweet child!" He caught a ringlet of her hair and twisted it about one finger. "Here," he said, "is our marriage ring. It's coloured red, richer than gold, and it'll bind me stronger."

"Tell me," she said suddenly, "about that woman."

"What woman?"

"You know—that one in the woods."

He stirred uneasily and shut his eyes. "Don't talk of her," he said. "Why do you mention her?"

"I want to know all about her. Was she as pretty as me? Did you love her?"

"Love her! I only saw her in the moonlight, that once. Don't talk about it, for God's sake!"

"But I must hear. If you didn't love her why did you do it?"

"Because of you!" He gripped her by the arm and stared at her. "Because you were driving me mad. I was mad. I saw her, and my rage, because you were lost to me, made me seize the poor wretch. God knows, I have suffered penance enough for it, and it works under my conscience like a mole, always there, always ready to spring out on me suddenly. Don't talk about it. I am yours now, body and soul. It's worth dying to have loved you."

"Don't talk of death . . ."

"Don't talk at all! A kiss, most precious, there's life in that!"

He pulled her gently to him by her hair until she leaned above him, her mouth parted above his, her body arched, leaning over him like a goddess out of the sky, her breath upon his cheek, warm and sweetly scented with ambergris.

"Sweet child, if we could only stay like this for ever!"

"If only we could, if only we could!" she cried.

Somebody knocked upon the door. Sudden fear in their eyes, they gazed at each other, tense, gripping each other fiercely, as if suddenly frozen, their eyes wide open and dark with unspoken terrors.

She put her finger on his mouth. Was it the King sending to take her to his bed? The very idea filled her with such utter repugnance that it made her feel ill. And his breath caught in his chest with jealous rage.

"Your grace, your grace, where are you? It's past one o'clock! You mustn't stay up longer or you'll be too tired for Mass."

It was Marget Morton, her low voice querulous with suspicion.

Culpeper felt Kate shake herself out of his embrace, slowly, silently; he heard her naked feet on the floor, the silky sound of disturbed rushes, then she tapped on the wall.

Lady Jane came out, rubbing the sleep from her eyelids, and, muttering to herself, went to the door.

"The Queen'll be with you very soon," she said, without opening the door. "Go away!"

"I'm not leaving till she comes. If I've got to sit on the stairs all night, I'll sit here till she comes," said Marget Morton. "I don't like it. Why won't she let me in if everything's as it should be?"

"Because your Queen and I are having an intimate

conversation and don't want to be disturbed. That's why."

"Why won't she speak to me? I'm not going. I'll sit here and let the watch find me. I tell you—I'm not going!"

"You insolent slut!" cried Lady Jane, her voice rising with anger. "Be off with you at once, you jade!"

"I tell you I'm sitting here . . ."

"Then sit there!" said Lady Jane, and turned furiously away. "Look at that!" she whispered fiercely to Kate, "that wretched creature will blab everything to-morrow!"

"She daren't. Witnesses in an affair like this get it as quick as the principals," laughed Culpeper.

"You're mad," said Lady Jane: "you're both mad!"

Every five or ten minutes Morton tapped on the door, just to show that she was still sitting there, a martyr.

"I'll strangle her," said Culpeper between his teeth.

"I'll turn her off," said Kate, "and let her seek another place."

"No, pet," he whispered, "we daren't breed malice."

"Oh, that I am a Queen!" she cried. "If I were only Mrs. Culpeper!"

It was past two o'clock when Marget Morton's cold feet dug vindictively into Kath Tylney's back as she slid under the blankets on the silken pallet in the Queen's ante-chamber.

"Jesus!" said Tylney, rolling over and sighing sleepily, "isn't the Queen abed yet?"

"Yes, even now," said Morton grimly.

"Jesus!" said Tylney again, and fell once more to sleep.

Past two o'clock, and the dark figure of Tom Culpeper, wrapped in his velvet cloak, stole through the narrow huddled streets of Lincoln, down the very steep hill. The houses seemed to fall into a bottomless pit before him. He was unable to walk properly. He felt that he must run so that his body would move in rhythm with his blood. But he dared not run lest the watch suspect him for a thief. He strode along as casually as he could, one hand gripping his sword-hilt. And although his feet stood on the cobbles, it seemed to him that he walked through a paradise where everything was soft and delicious, where such mundane things as man-built roads and man-built houses did not exist, where nothing existed but himself and a dream that bore the name of Kate. For he could not believe that it had been Kate with him this night. It was too glorious to be real. It was but a sweet dream sent by the Lady Venus, a dream poignant and unbearably beautiful.

But when at last in the Green Dragon Inn he had cast off his clothes and crept into bed beside the snoring Charles Howard, he slept at once, like a man deeply refreshed, a man drunk with heavenly dew.

Kate slept also, the moment her curtains had been drawn and hooked by a grim and silent Marget Morton; the night-light on the ledge of the bed diffused a delicate radiance as it swam in its bowl, glimmering on the gold thread of the needlework curtains. Very peaceful and somehow very innocent that room looked as Morton stepped out through the tapestries into the ante-chamber to a restless night—or rather, morning—for Marget Morton could not sleep; no matter which way she turned or what she thought, no matter what old sleeping tricks she used, such as pressing her hands on her stomach, moving from left side to right side, no! Marget Morton could not sleep.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

And Further Nights

DAYLIGHT WAS NOW SOMETHING TO BRIDGE until nightfall. Culpeper hated it; he walked about the city, poking through the mobs, having a drink here and there when he was able to push his way into a taproom, and watching the holiday crowds. Like most of the buildings in England, almost all the houses were of wood and very old, for Lincoln was an ancient town, built first by the Romans; a great many of the houses were beginning to rot and to lean crazily forward with their overhanging upper stories. Much of the old Roman wall still remained, and there was a beautiful bridge to the south-west, over the Witham, where it ran into the great sheet of sparkling water, the Brayford, surrounded by marsh and scattered blue pools, the home of wild duck. It was a pretty bridge, but Culpeper felt all the Londoner's superiority when he compared it to that mighty Bridge of London; this was only a tiny one of five semi-circular projecting stone ribs. They had been rebuilding it recently, and much of the scaffolding remained near the ford on the eastern side, almost under the desecrated chapel of St. Thomas of Canterbury; and the houses on top were in very good condition.

Culpeper examined everything, and even walked up the great hill to the Minster, a title to which the Cathedral had no right, for it had never been attached to a monastery. It was a most beautiful building, however, and here the Londoner was badly routed—St. Paul's could not compare with this superb place.

It was, of course, crowded, for only the altar itself was sacred, and business was being transacted, lovers were arranging meetings, men were showing off, chattering, laughing, brawling, and blaspheming. Awed by the church's beauty, Culpeper scarcely noticed the crowd, as he gaped up at the great stained windows and the sweeping bays; in the Angel Choir, his neck grew stiff with gazing upwards at the series of thirteenth-century sculptures in the spandrels of the triforium arches.

Mother Mary smiled with arch pride at the little Jesus in his shift, as he stood in her lap. One hand pushed back her hood, the other upheld her left breast in a firm hand, so that He might drink; behind the Child, a winged acolyte swung the golden censer perilously close to His little head. It affected Culpeper deeply with its feeling of gentle motherhood, and he turned to the next figure, where the angel raised the crown of terrible thorns, and next to the crown a giant angel sat, his knees heavy with drapery, his neck flung back, the head leaning a little forward, and the brows puckered with a feeling of firm, restrained rage; in his right hand he held a great sword, while the left hand was pushing two figures away from him, the figures of a man and a woman with bowed heads whispering together, their hands hidden, hiding their shame, stumbling over a field of thorns—Adam and Eve banished from the Garden. Under the implacable angel's feet, pushed down by the sliding drapery, was a woman's sadly smiling face, severed from the trunk just above the breasts, severed as if chopped off, and being pushed down by the Angel of the Lord, the great and terrible avenging angel with the flaming sword in his right hand—the left hand, the elbow up, disdainfully pushing off the fallen man and woman as a man might scoop two broken chessmen from a board.

With sudden horror, Culpeper turned and pushed his

way through the mob. He did not feel as if he could breathe until he stood in the street again, wiping the sweat from his forehead. He glanced up : the Bishop's Palace was facing him, and in that palace, Kate was sitting at that moment.

WHILE to him every minute of the day was a hell of waiting, to her every minute apart only added to the ecstasy when they would meet again. She waited with blissful quietude for the sun to go, and she yawned with her ladies and gentlewomen and maids, she lolled about her rooms, a contented smile continually curving her lips -the smile of one who tastes again with slow delight the honey of past happiness.

The King, as merry as ever, came to see her.

He came with Sommers, who was always with him nowadays, following shiftily, sniffing as if he were a dog at his master's heels. His keen eyes in their dark hollows were as bright as a bird's, and saw everything.

" You look your best to-day, Kate ! " cried the King, and chucked her under the chin. " I've never seen you look so lovely ! "

" Like a cat after it's drunk its plate of milk ! " cried Sommers gaily. " What is there about women that makes men think of cats ? It can't be claws in those soft little hands. Tell me out of your wisdom, Harry mine."

" They are so soft to hold," said Henry tenderly, " so quiet, and so soothing. Yes, you're right, Will, she's like her own cat to-day. The sweetest of pussies ! " He rested his great golden head upon her bosom and gazed up, smiling, into her smiling face.

If she was a cat, thought Sommers a little sadly, then Henry was a dog—as faithful as a dog, as awkward in the house and as swift in the field, and as dangerous when he was worried or afraid.

Although he had great licence, Sommers did not say

that aloud: he kept his licence because, for all his jeers, he never really jeered at Henry himself.

"It's best I go," he said, "and I'll take all your women with me. You have your rose, Harry: surely all these weeds bunched together won't equal your own flower, and you won't grudge me them?"

"I have chosen you a new wife, Will," said the King, winking up at Kate and turning lazily to grin at the jester. "Such a wife! the only wife for you, sauce-box!"

Sommers listened gravely, tense for the insult that he knew was coming. He could not bear jesting about a wife—his great loss was too recent for that. "Her name, your grace?" he cried.

"Jane!" said the King, with a yelp of laughter. "My daughter's pretty merry Jane!"

Sommers went very white. Jane, Jane the Fool! Princess Mary's dribbling wench, her fool! It was intolerable.

"Harry, Harry!" he cried, trying to speak merrily, "I accept with gratitude. Always, I've put off marriage because I dread to be sataned with horns. Even though you give me a queasy wife I'll have an easy head. Perhaps I'll be the only husband in all your realm who can rest and think no harm of the shanks beside him!

If ye'd marry, marry like me,
And poke out your tongue at cuckoldry,
A pretty face may look all right
But they're all the same when you douce the light."

Henry took him up at once, for they often discoursed for hours in crude rhymes:

"*No, not the only one, my Will,*
I too can sleep with the birds until
With the birds I rise and sing my fill,
Not a cuckoo anywhere to kill,

and not because she's queasy and unlovable like your Jane, my boy, but because her heart's as beautiful as her face. A good heart is what you want in a wife, Will boy!"

"I didn't include you, Harry," said Sommers, "because, as you know, all men envy you."

And they were silent in the gay morning light: the Queen sitting in her chair, stroking the King's short, curving beard, and the jester smiling queerly at her over the King's bowed head.

The King went visiting. Kate was too tired to go with him, she pleaded, but Culpeper rode with his gentlemen over the street to the ancient Norman castle. It was directly opposite the palace, but the crowd was so enormous and so excited that Henry rode down the hill a little to show himself off. It was a monstrous crowd stretching on every side, in every lane and street, dressed in jolly holiday clothes.

There was no work done by the citizens of Lincoln that day. They might curse the King behind locked doors, and talk about the courtiers as vultures and locusts, yet they cheered them lustily enough when they rode contemptuously over the newly gravelled streets. There was not a maid, wench, wife, or widow in all that city who did not caressingly draw her richest clothing from the lavender of old chests and hope to catch some becurled gallant's lackadaisical eye, while their men sat glumly in taverns and struggled to think of sarcastic things to say. Yet the men, too, cheered when the King rode by.

The brightest hangings were hooked and nailed outside windows, and threaded on lines across the streets from roof-top to roof-top. Flags were unfurled, tavern and shop signs repainted. The women had languished before their steel mirrors, craving to discover another inch of skin unexplored, unpainted, unfarded, or un-

perfumed. What eager eyes had noted the fall of a Court gown, and at night, at home, nearly blinded themselves at intricate embroideries. How the dressmakers were bullied and screamed at! How the laundresses nearly scrubbed their gnarled hands away to make white seem whiter! What arguments about the gallants' smiles!—to whom was that smile meant? to me? to you, or to her, the cat?—to whom did that lusty fellow bow? to whom did that man flick a kiss from his whiskers?

The King with his courtiers passed on towards the Castle, and the Lincoln maids were left, left in the windows of the same dull houses, sighing as they gazed on painted walls, envying the Queen who possessed that great man and all this England. What would they not have done to be Queen! to have their friends say catty, envious things! to wear gold chains about their throats, to hide their hands in jewels and their bodies under cloth-of-gold, and to have a hundred men and women to wait upon each supercilious nod!

They were so disappointed this day because Queen Katharine was not riding with the King for them to envy and love . . . that lucky, lucky Queen. . . .

Days must pass before Culpeper saw her again. It was so difficult, Kate said. They must not risk too much lest they lose everything. He knew that if he had pressed her, she would have consented to see him whenever he wished, but Lady Jane Rochford had been present at their farewells. Lady Jane had watched, holding the candle, tapping an impatient foot on the inch-thick rushes on the floor.

And so, two days of excruciating length must pass before he met her again.

He could not believe that it was true when he saw the sun at last dip in the west, and he realised that one of those two days was gone.

Culpeper was now completely alone : even Hubbard had left him, had run away that night and disappeared to God alone knew where. Everybody fled from him as if he were a leper. His love was dangerous. He was alone, and he luxuriated in his loneliness.

And the clock did not stop ; the two days actually passed, and once again he was at that little turret door, and this time it swung open at a touch. He stepped warily up the narrow winding stairs and entered Lady Jane's chamber where Kate awaited him.

They kissed lingeringly in that first kiss of greeting. Lady Jane had gone to bed. "Sleep was *her* rejuvenator," she told them; and to avoid being disturbed, Kate had brought Tylney with her, for she trusted Tylney more than Morton, and had sent her to talk to Lady Jane's women, with instructions not to leave until she was called.

"But you must not stay late," she whispered as she drew back and, in his arms, gazed tenderly, searchingly into Culpeper's face.

"I feel now," said he, "that I'll never be able to leave you."

She laughed archly.

"I am a tomrigg!" she cried. "Do you know, I am too kind a girl! I should have brought you into such a trade as Bray has my Lord Parr in, who cannot eat nor drink and crawls like a spaniel with his nose on the ground! If I wanted to, I could, you know!"

"You could do whatever you wished with me," he answered quite solemnly. "But you're no such woman as Bray."

"We're all born different. I was born foolish, that's the difference. Do you know, love," she said, turning slyly aside, yet with a wicked light in her eyes, "if I had tarried in the maids' chamber with poor

Anne of Cleves as Queen, I would have tried you! What think you of your Kate now?"

"I can't think of anything but love for my Kate!"

"Dear heart, how I adore you! Hold me tightly in your strong arms!"

No longer did they suffer the tortures of love. The first shock of encounter over, they were quietly merry together, playing and jesting as if they were alone in some garden with no risk of watching eyes, with no giant shadow of an arrogant King upon them.

Once Fryswide, one of the chamberers, was sent by Morton to knock at the door to ask why the Queen tarried so late, and Kate woke Lady Jane out of her sleep to pack her off.

"I'll have my revenge," said Lady Jane. "I'll keep you turtles company for a while."

She had changed greatly from the woman who had turned on Kate the other night. She was all sympathy now, and Kate—so swiftly changing, so eager to change from hatred to love—dismissed that memory and did not question this sudden friendship.

Lady Jane was lightly lascivious in her talk, as only a Court lady could be. She made them blush, and Kate clung to her lover, her head against his knees as he sat on a gilt stool—she was as coy as a child, and outwardly as innocent.

It was a happy night, and when at last, at four in the morning, Tylney lighted Kate to her own bedchamber, Kate was yawning with contentment.

"We have lived long together, your grace," said Tylney, as she tucked his mistress into bed; "what is happening? what do these late nights mean? You can trust me. Tell me."

"Nothing, dear; what on earth are you talking about?"

Tylney looked into those large, innocent blue eyes, darkly blue now in the candlelight, and sighed. She knew the uselessness of asking questions to eyes that could lie so sweetly and so convincingly.

It was so easy after all !

Kate looked at her bed-curtains as she lay under the sheets. What a fool, she thought, Nan Bullen must have been to let herself be caught so easily !

Oh, what a fool she must have been !

It was good to be in bed when you were tired . . . how soft the pillows, how comfy the feather-beds, and how light the silk sheets !

Bed was a lovely place . . . a lovely place. . . .

PART FOUR

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Pirate Comes to Court

POMFRET—Pontefract as it was officially called—in Yorkshire stood upon a little hill. All the countryside around was hilly, rising in low ridges thick with grass, sliding into gentle valleys. On one of these little hills stood Pomfret, clustered about the four great towers of the Castle, that was built on solid rock; the town fell away from the Castle as if it were spilled on the stone walls—it slid down the slight hill on each side, old wooden houses hobnobbing together. The soil was very rich, and there were many gardens, the fields all around were high with corn. Coming from Lincoln, it was like a miniature of that city, a very beautiful miniature; there the town was dominated by the Minster, here it was dominated by the Castle. Day or night, that Castle towered above the city, sombre, inescapable. During the recent rebellion it could have held out against Aske and his rabble indefinitely had not the defenders, the Archbishop of York and Lord Darcy, surrendered almost immediately after the rascals came under the walls. A great old castle it was; nestling at its foot was the magnificent Church of All Saints—a church that anywhere else would have been the centre of the town, but here the Castle dwarfed it as it dwarfed everything else near by.

The Court arrived on 23rd August, a wretchedly hot day, and not very long after its arrival two strangers rode up the hill into the town.

They rode together, these two strangers, but one of them alone drew the glances of the people. He sat astride his horse and gazed contemptuously about him, one hand on hip, like a man returning home after long voyaging not particularly pleased at the way things have gone in his absence. He was a figure one could not help but notice : well over six feet, with proportionately broad shoulders, he was dressed in the most garish of colours and with ostentatious jewellery. His yellow beard was trimmed into an unfashionable fork, jutting out each side into sharp points ; his moustaches went upwards, arrogantly. And his young face was dark and heavily lined ; he was not yet thirty, but the last two years of his life he had spent upon the dangerous Irish coast, with the salt wind beating his face to leather. The wind had darkened the skin, coarsened it, had marked his forehead into ridges by wrinkling his eyes to shut it out, and the eyes themselves had lost much of their colour as if it had been beaten out of the pupils, that were now faded to a soft grey.

He was Francis Dereham, just home from a-pirating.

Next to him rode his friend, Robert Damport—or Davenport, he called himself both, or either—a squat, young, grinning rascal, very dark, very truculent. Dereham's box was strapped on to the back of Damport's horse.

They rode through the streets of Pomfret that were still bustling with the last arrivals of the progress. But even after the passing of the King and his courtiers, these travellers aroused interest, and the women, who were turning from their windows and pouting because the show was over for the day, turned back for another glance as the young, fair giant rode under the brilliant hangings that were meant for the King.

"How like His Highness," they whispered. "Can it be Prince Edward in disguise?" then shrugged at remembering that Edward was only three or four years

of age; perhaps, however—and this was even more romantic—perhaps the King's own son in everything but name?

But Dereham was no relation of the King's. He was a distant relation of the Howards, and that was the noblest blood he could own to; nobler it was than the King's, in truth, for Henry was but two generations from that handsome Welsh squire, Edmund Tidder, whose masculine beauty had so enraptured the heart of Henry V's gay widow, Katharine, that she had actually married him and produced Henry's father, Henry VII, after his half-brother, that other Henry, the Sixth, had been quietly murdered. Altogether, Henry's lineage, despite the sweat of Clarencieux King-of-Arms, was not one that was particularly noble, while the Howards could—and did—claim descent from the mighty Charlemagne, through Queen Adelicia, wife of Henry I.

And Francis Dereham, a distant sprig of the Howards, was therefore a still more distant sprig of Charlemagne, although he never bothered to think it out.

After entering Pomfret, he stopped once only, to ask where the Court had been installed, and on being told that they were at the Castle, he had no further need for directions. He rode on in the same careless, rather contemptuous fashion. He looked like a man who had a grim duty before him, and who wished to get it over as swiftly as possible.

WHEN he strode into the Queen's Presence Chamber that morning, the women all turned to look curiously upon him, the men uptilted their moustaches and gazed sneeringly at his gay clothes.

Lady Baynton opened her little mouth wide and cast a horrified glance at her half-sister, Lady Arundel, and both turned to glance at their other sister, the Queen, to see what she would do. Kath Tylney dropped the embroidery in her hand and swore under her breath one

of those oaths that women should not use, an oath upon Our Saviour's name, called by men, jovially, "Good Hunting Oaths." She blushed scarlet and darted swift glances about, fearful of having been overheard.

Dereham seemed unaffected by the interest he aroused. He stood at the door, a handsome figure, gazing around from under his eyelids until he saw the Queen, and swaggered towards her.

Everybody noted how she darted to him, how she left my Lord Parr in the very midst of a sentence and darted to the stranger, her face flushed, eyes sparkling.

"Frank!" she cried. "Why didn't you warn me you were coming? It's not fair to take me by surprise like this!"

He bowed low—too low for real courtesy—swinging the rushes aside with the plume of his yellow velvet cap as if he bent to kiss her hidden feet. Then abruptly he straightened himself.

"We are both surprised," he said, smiling with a sudden flash of brilliant teeth. "I didn't warn you because I've ridden as hard as my own messenger could have done. I said suddenly to the Dowager: 'Lend me Damport, I'm going to her,' and here I am."

"In answer to my prayer." She glanced cautiously around as if afraid of being overheard; and noticing that everybody was looking at her, she drew Dereham apart into a window-recess, through the lozenges of which a great rolling landscape could be seen in the strong August light.

"I do so need true councillors, Frank," she whispered, twisting her hands together. "There's only Lady Jane I can trust."

"Me you can always trust. You know that," said Dereham. "The seas have not changed me, and nothing will. I thought to kill memories, but I could not forget, not in drink or in strange women's arms. I haven't changed, Kate."

"Don't let's talk of that, please, Frank. I was a child. . . . I don't mean to reproach you, I reproach nobody, not even myself. But that's all past. I'm grown-up now. Ah, this makes it harder for me to tell you. I thought you'd have changed as I've changed." She glanced nervously from side to side, wrenching at her lace cuffs that rippled almost to her finger-tips.

"I am in love, Frank," she said suddenly, jerkily.

He strove to command himself, yet the colour went from his cheeks. "I'd heard something of the sort," he muttered. "That's why I came."

"Who told you? My God, has it spread as quickly as all that! I thought it was a secret!"

"And so it is—buried deep in my breast. I knew the symptoms, child. Tylney, who loves you nearly as much as I, wrote to the Dowager, from Hatfield, after you'd left Lincoln. She said that at Lincoln you'd twice left your chamber and stayed away for hours; and that some jade called Morton was afeared."

"Morton! What does Morton dare think?"

"Tylney's very words are these—I have them printed on my heart—she wrote: 'Marget Morton saith that she suspects Kate of villainy, for at Hatfield here she saw her look out of window on this lad Culpeper after such sort that she feared there was love between them.'"

"My God!" said Kate, then was silent with rage. If only she could poison Morton! It would be worth being boiled alive in lead or water to poison the brach! She remembered now at their last stopping-place, Hatfield, Culpeper had been walking on the terrace and she had spied upon him from her window. Did her features reveal so much that at a glance Morton could read her heart? She must be careful.

"When I read that of Tylney's," said Dereham, "I jumped on my horse and came straight to Court.

For I smelt danger for my little Kate, and where danger is, there stands Frank Dereham!"

"God bless you, Frank! I must have you near me, for my heart is shrivelling with desire for some one I can talk to. You must be my new secretary, as fat-faced Paget is going to France next month and is now Clerk of the Parliament, so I have nobody to write my letters for me. I'll speak to the King the minute I see him. Do this for me, will you, Frank?—seek out Master Tom Culpeper, send him my heart's love, and by your faith in God, Frank, protect him for me. I couldn't bear that any harm should come to him."

"You love him so?" said Dereham in a muffled voice.

"I love him more than I thought body and soul were capable of. Shhh! here comes that cat Isabel. Talk, quick, quick; tell me about Ireland!"

Dereham did not turn as a less cautious man might have done, nor did he raise his voice: he said drawlingly, "Yes, Kate, they soak their bodies with saffron, these wild Irishmen; it looks pretty, as if they were all sun-children, but they do it because the place is as lousy as this Pomfret is said to be, and they have no other protection against the vermin. And as for the women! there's little courtship needed: you've only got to nod at them or offer the littlest white money to be torn to pieces by a hundred; they're so poor that they are mostly naked. . . . Ah, if it isn't Lady Isabel!"

He swung round, bowing, as if he had just seen her.

"Good-morrow to you, Master Dereham," said Lady Baynton with her cold smile, "and, let us hope—good-bye."

Kate cried, "You mustn't talk like that, Isabel, to old friends!" And Dereham laughed, showing all his teeth, as he answered:

"Isabel's tongue was always the sharpest in the family. Being the eldest, I suppose it was the poor child's only protection. How old are you now,

Isabel? Have you passed the age of marrying? But, of course, you are married, aren't you?"

Dereham's jokes were raw things, but they hurt just the same, and he knew exactly how to hurt Lady Baynton, by digging at her age, for she liked to consider herself very youthful.

"So you've come to drag down all that our family has built!" she snarled. "To ruin us all!"

"Still harping on ruins, Isabel," smiled Dereham. "I suppose it's natural, with a husband even older than yourself. Besides, he's rather fond of ruins, if I remember. He played a pretty part with your cousin, Nan Bullen."

"A true man's part," said Isabel icily, "and he's prepared to play it again. And I'll play it with him this time."

"There's no need to warn us," said he. "You always did hate me, Isabel. Let's be friends now. I come as a friend."

"Too dangerous a friend for me. Your very presence here breeds scandal. Already Wilks has talked a little."

Dereham gave no sign, but Kate turned to her sister with horror in her eyes.

"What has she been saying?" she cried. "The wretch!"

"Surely you can guess what she's been saying? She's married some low, drunken murderer called Restwold. I know no more than that. Sir Edward just mentioned it to me last night in bed."

"Oh, oh, cannot one wipe away the past!"

"Not when you are Queen. Talk softer, you fool. They'll all hear you if you shout like that. Get rid of this man at once!"

Dereham shook his head.

"I see more every minute," he said, "the necessity of Kate having a friend beside her."

"An enemy!" said Isabel.

"A friend," repeated Dereham in the same tone. "I am to be her secretary."

"You pair of fools!" Isabel smiled cruelly. "Hang yourselves, if you wish."

"They don't hang you," said Dereham, "they chop off your head. . . ."

But Isabel was already gone, smiling sweetly to show everybody else in the room how innocent had been the conversation.

"Don't worry now," said Dereham, "leave it all to me. I'll see Wilks when we get back to London. See this man, this Culpeper, all you can, every chance you get; and damn them all!"

"There is nothing for me to fear, is there, Frank?" she asked pleadingly.

"Nothing, my dear, nothing," he lied.

NOTHING to fear! My God, what a child she was! Francis Dereham did not feel safe until he had crossed the drawbridge and was in the street again, with God's sky above him, away from the dangerous atmosphere of that Court room. He had faced dangers innumerable on shipboard, dangers from sea and man, from violent storms whirling his little ship in the vast ocean, from hand-to-hand boarding fights amongst the rigging, but never had he felt such fear as now, fear as of a halter slipping inevitably about his thick neck.

They were doomed, without hope. Poor Kate, how could he save her from herself, and this Culpeper must be a lunatic or a damned villain. Anyhow he'd soon find that out, as he had asked his address from the Porter's Lodge on his way out.

In the street, Damport picked his teeth with a piece of straw as he held the bridles of the two horses, still sitting on his own.

"Turned you down, did she?" he asked, grinning at Dereham.

Dereham shook his golden head. "No," he said, then glancing up with a sudden smile, he asked: "Ever seen a dying man, Bob?"

"No," said Damport glumly.

"Then you're seeing one now," laughed Dereham. "I'm dead within twelve months, I bet you. Will you take it? And I could escape if I wanted to; I'm a free man. My ship's on the coast ready for me. Yet I stay to die. What do you think of that, my friend?"

"That you're either drunk or mad," said Damport. "Anyhow, get on your horse; this weather's made for sitting in a tavern."

"I've business to do first." Dereham leaped on his horse. "It's at an inn, the Hermit's Head. You can swill all you wish," he laughed: "but dying men don't drink."

CULPEPER was fortunately alone in his room at the Hermit's Head when Dereham entered. He was sitting at the window, reading a book he had borrowed from his cousin, Surrey, the poet: it was Hawes's *Pastime of Pleasure*, for love had awakened in him an interest in poetry, and for the first time in his life he began to read, although with great difficulty—such difficulty, in fact, that he often lost all sense of the rhythm, but received gratifying thrills when every now and then he recognised in the poet various symptoms of his own love.

He gazed up owlishly when Dereham lounged through the curtained doorway, for his brain still rang with the line, "*Her shining hair so properly she dresses*," and he could not bring his dream of Kate back to the present.

Dereham strode boldly over to him and smiled quizzingly, one eye half-shut, for he did nothing impulsively—every gesture was acted before an admiring self.

"Ay, a pretty lad!" he said. "You are Tom Culpeper?"

"That is my name," said Culpeper coldly. "Who are you?"

"And, God-o'-mercy! he reads poetry!" cried Dereham, snatching the book out of Culpeper's hand and glancing on the open page. Then with great gusto he read aloud in a shouting tone:

"*With a little pit in her well-favoured chin,*
Her neck white and long as any lily,
With veins blue in which the blood ran in,
Her paps round, and thereto right pretty,
Her arms slender, and of goodly body,
Her fingers small and thereto right long,
White as the milk with blue veins among,
Her feet proper; she gartered well her hose. . . ."

He threw the book contemptuously on to the table. "She's prettier than that, eh, Culpeper? Why read these stinking verses when a woman treads the ground and puts every line to shame!"

"Who the devil are you?" cried Culpeper, leaping to his feet.

"Steady, boy, steady." Dereham smiled at him. "I like you better in a rage. You're more of a man then."

"By God, sir, are you mad? I wear a sword, remember!"

"So do I, so does everybody. Don't talk of fighting. The word strikes sparks inside me. I've come on a love mission. From your mistress."

The blood rushed from Culpeper's face. He gazed at Dereham, striving to understand what this man knew.

"From Kate," said Dereham, still smiling.

"What are you talking about!" Culpeper struggled to get a grip of himself. "I see you must be mad, and we must put up with madmen's antics. Will you kindly leave me alone?"

"I promised our Kate that I'd look after you," said Dereham softly. "She seems to think you aren't to be trusted alone. Mayhap she knows best. When I first rode here I came loosening my sword in its sheath because

I came to kill you. But I see I am too late. You're killing yourself, and her too. I can only do the generous thing that I was born to do—die with you both."

He had been sitting on the table, and now he lounged to his feet, yawning and stretching his giant body.

"Now," he said, "that I've seen you, I'm going to get drunk. It's the only logical thing to do. By the way, my name's Dereham, Francis Dereham. Hasn't Kate mentioned it to you?"

"I have never heard it before—thank God!" said Culpeper.

Dereham smiled wryly. "I don't suppose I should have expected it," he said with a shrug, "and yet . . . If you're seeing Kate to-night, boy, ask her about me, she'll tell you everything—everything she wants you to know, anyhow."

He strode to the door, and stood there a moment as if expecting to be called back, but Culpeper neither moved nor spoke. He was too mystified to say or do anything. He could only stare at this strange giant who had burst upon him and seemed to know everything about him. Then as Dereham slid out of the room, it seemed to Culpeper that he had dreamed it all.

He darted to the door, just in time to see Dereham before he descended the stairs. Dereham bowed and blew him a kiss from his forked beard, then, roaring with forced laughter, he ran swiftly down the stairs.

Culpeper instinctively crossed himself; a cold tremor brought the hairs up rigid on his body.

Could it be Satan come upon him for his sins?

CULPEPER was lodged in the Hermit's Head Inn, not far from the Southgate, where the fourteenth-century hermit, Adam de Laythorp, had hewn out a cave in the face of the rock and carved seventy steps down into the well.

When he was downstairs and in the Hermit's Head taproom, Dereham elbowed his way brutally through

the mob, bought a pottle of wine from the taverner, then fought his way into the street where Damport awaited him, having seen to the stabling of the horses.

"Come, Bob!" cried Dereham, flinging his arms about his friend. "Here's a pottle, full to the neck. Let's get drunk, quick, quick; let's get beastly drunk. We'll sit in the street and trip everybody up. I want to keep my eye on that door."

They drank in a shadowed corner of the street, and insulted the passers-by. They sat under a shop, closed for the holiday. It was a barber's and the upper story leaned forward, threatening every second to tumble on top of them. The pottle was heavy to lift, but at every drink it grew lighter, and soon they drank it so dry that Damport could toss it in the air with one hand.

The day went, and still they drank there. The lanthorn was lighted in the high sculptured tower of All Saints Church below the Castle, lanthorns and torches were hung outside doors, windows were shuttered against thieves; and still the two friends drank and quarrelled friendlily together.

"There, there he goes!" whispered Dereham suddenly, gripping Damport by the wrist. "He doesn't know you. Follow him, but don't let him see you!"

Then "O Christ!" he cried, when Damport had slid off into the darkness after Culpeper; "O Christ!" and he pummelled with his great fists against the shutters on the window behind him.

There were excited shouts from within as the flimsy wood rattled under the blows.

"What is it?" shrieked a woman's voice. "What do you want?"

"It is me, blood and death and God's own wounds! Christ, Christ!"

Doubled up as if with pain, he ran up the street with a speed surprising in one so bulky; then remembering that if he ran too far he would miss

Damport, he darted back to the barber's shop and leaned against the wall, groaning.

He was with her now, that milky rat! that silken-hearted fop! . . . Ah, God, dear God! . . .

Dereham never could resist acting, even when the only audience was himself; he did not know he was acting, but then, of course, he was quite drunk, and he didn't know that either.

This was their first meeting since at Lincoln, over a fortnight ago. As Culpeper held again that beloved body in his arms, all thought of Dereham was driven from his mind. He forgot that Satan had come to earth with the express purpose of mocking at him; he knew only the fierce delight of flesh upon flesh.

But later, when blood was cooled, and the mind regained control, he remembered and turned with dark frightened eyes to Kate.

"Do you know a man called Dereham?" he asked.

He did not expect her to say Yes, and was really shocked when he heard her whisper, "So Frank sought you out, did he? He was always a man to keep his word."

"Then he—you do know him?"

"He is my truest friend." Idly she played with his cropped hair, rubbing her palm over the bristles. "He's a distant relation of mine, one of my uncle's gentlemen-pensioners, and he was often at the Lady Dowager's, where we grew up together. He's been very kind to me, and now that he's come to Court I'm going to make him my secretary. We have such need of strong friends, you and I!"

Troubled, Culpeper caught her hand and gazed steadily at her through the darkness.

"You—you don't care for this man, do you?" he asked harshly.

"Jealous, my love!" She laughed. "You haven't need to be. Poor Frank! he's just a brother to me, a

big, kind, bearish brother. Nothing else and never was. He didn't dare to suggest that there was, did he?"

"He told me nothing," said Culpeper. "Ah, love!" he cried, seizing Kate by the shoulders and dragging her down to him, "I can't bear to think of other men! Even the thought of the King with you burns me up! You never have cared for him, for this Dereham fellow? Tell me the truth, before God."

With a dreamy, innocent look in her large blue eyes, Kate shook her head, smiling tenderly. "Before God I love only you," she said.

"And this Dereham never meant anything?"

"Upon the rood, I swear it!"

"And you have never loved anybody but me?"

"No, never anybody."

"If only we had stayed together as babies!" he cried, "and I had seen you shoot up into childhood, ripen from childhood to girlhood until you blossomed into maidenhood! Why wasn't I with you all the time and grown with you? I can't bear to think that I wasn't next to you when you awoke to love and the meaning of Spring-time. What man was near you then?"

"His name," said Kate archly, "was Master Tom Culpeper. I didn't love until I saw you. Do you think that I too don't regret those wasted years? I was waiting for you all the time and didn't even know your name!"

"God should always breed lovers in one place together. It isn't fair to have secret memories that the other can't enter into. What are you thinking of all the time? I never really know."

"I am thinking all the time—of you," said Kate prettily.

They were together in that ante-chamber of Lady Jane's; and in the dark street, opposite the Hermit's Head, Dereham lounged on the cobbles with his friend, Damport. The watch came by and inspected

them, but Dereham refused to move. He lay full length, hands behind his head, long legs crossed, and dared them to try to lift him. And at last they left him there, for he was too splendidly dressed to be a thief or cut-throat, and they were the town watch, not the King's. Already they had been beaten by a mob of courtiers, and their lanthorns were smashed, their bills broken, and their bones aching.

"Why the hell wouldn't they fight?" grumbled Dereham, taking a gulp of wine. "I ache for a fight."

Damport only grunted, and Dereham was silent for a moment before he burst out again:

"They've been together for hours and hours now!" he grumbled. "He was reading poetry when I saw him. What do you think of that, Bob?"

"Never read any poetry in all my life," said Damport complacently. "Except what the priest reads out in chapel. That's poetry, isn't it?"

"He was reading love poetry, all about how pretty doxies are."

"Do poets write things like that?" Damport gazed at him with the amazed fish-like stare of the drunkard. "What do they write them for? I don't need poetry to tell me what a jade looks like. They must think a man's blind. There's enough wenches about without a man wanting to read about 'em in books. What's he want to read about 'em for? There's no sense in that."

"He's in love, you fool."

"Well, I've been in love, plenty of times, but it's never made me read poetry. What's poetry got to do with it? I know all about the cats without reading poetry. I don't know what you're talking about. You're drunk."

"Aw, you're hopeless. You've got the mind of an egg. You don't call that love, do you, tickling filthy kitchen-sluts?"

"Well, what do you call it? I've been told often enough that it's love. It's what you get preached

against you, isn't it? What they put you and the girl in the cart for, with notices round your necks saying that you've been naughty packs together: isn't that right? I've been had up enough for it, anyhow. That's love. I ought to know. I had a hell of a time with Izzy Wright; she had me up before the justices, but I got a lot of my friends to say they'd been with her behind the barn, and got out that way. If that's not love, what is it?"

"You're drunk."

"I know I'm drunk, but that doesn't stop me from knowing what love is. Let me tell you, Frank Dereham . . ."

"Oh, shut up!"

"Well, if you don't want to hear . . ."

"I don't."

"It's about Meggy Capon . . ."

"Will you shut up!"

"All right. It wasn't worth hearing anyhow." Damport grinned. "Pass me the pottle."

It was very quiet. In the inn opposite, the last drinkers were setting up a howl because the landlord was sleepy and wanted them to go. Then they, too, quietened, and the silence of night soaked into the street, a silence that seemed deliberately sent to cover a dark and terrible deed.

Would that dog never come home?

He was coming soon now. One last kiss, while Lady Jane held up the candle. Lady Jane had entered into the spirit of the affair with gusto.. Realising the futility of trying to dam the torrent, she had decided to let it rush on until it ebbed into satiation. But, despite herself, she had been caught up by the excitement and was thrilled by proxy. She received a kind of voluptuous pleasure in listening and peeping, in seeing the happy exhaustion in Kate's blue eyes, in saying sly things to

her, even in fondling her as she laid her into bed and combed life into the long, damp, red hair.

She smiled upon them now as they embraced in farewell.

"I hate to go," said Culpeper. "I must come to-morrow night. I'll die if I don't come to-morrow night."

Kate looked appealingly at Lady Jane, and Lady Jane smiled and said, "We'll never find a safer place than here. This old castle is a warren of corridors and staircases, and the back stairs lead right to your bedroom. You could bolt the door on the maids, and have the back door to escape by. There'd be less talk then than your coming here makes."

"I can really see him to-morrow!" Girlishly, she clapped her hands, her face rosy with joy.

"Perhaps, this once," admitted Lady Jane.

"Now I can leave easier." Culpeper took Kate's head in both hands, holding her over the little ears, and with his mouth almost on hers, his eyes watching her eyes, he murmured:

"I've been reading since I last saw you. I've been reading poetry. And there is a poem of Sir Thomas Wyatt's that I feel I might have written to you myself, had I the power. Listen, love:

And graven with Diamonds with letters plain
There is written, her fair neck round about:
'Noli me tangere'—for Cæsar's I am,
And wild for to hold, though I seem tame . . ."

Lady Jane almost dropped the candle as she heard those words.

"God-o'-mercy!" she cried, eyes wide with horror, "what are you saying, man! Tom Wyatt wrote those lines to Nan Bullen!"

And they were suddenly silent, all three, gazing at each other, struck statuesque with terror, their startled breath caught in their chests, as if something evil had

crept into that room, conjured by the magic of those words written by a brave man despairing because his love had become the King's love. *Noli me tangere* . . . and Culpeper had touched her, he had clasped Cæsar's own. . . .

Nan Bullen had laid her little neck against the wooden block, and the great sword had whirled through the air, had spun like quicksilver in the sunlight and been suddenly gorged with young blood, with woman's blood . . . blood flung out on to the grass of Tower Green, gushing in a torrent like a suddenly turned-on fountain, bursting from that writhing white body, from that red, twisting mass of muscle and tendon that had been Nan Bullen's little throat. . . .

"BACK at last!" Dereham leaped to his feet as Culpeper's cloaked figure stole along the street. Dereham was up in an instant, and had darted swiftly over the cobbles on tiptoe until he was on top of Culpeper without Culpeper hearing him approach.

"Look out!" bawled Dereham. "Here comes the King, man, here comes the King!"

Culpeper staggered, his heart seemed to stop its beating; he felt suddenly sick and cold as he gazed wild-eyed into Dereham's grinning face.

"By God, man," he stuttered, the sweat bursting out on face and body, "do you want to kill me!"

"I am your friend!" said Dereham, standing suddenly erect with shoulders back and head up. "Your friend, your bodyguard, Frank Dereham, who fears no man, not even a King. Did she tell you anything about me? What did she say?"

"Nothing much," growled Culpeper, breathing deeply to regain his composure. "Said she'd known you for years, that you were her best friend."

"And it's perfectly true, perfectly true. Every word of it. Did she say anything else?"

"What else do you expect her to say? Damn it, Dereham, I don't like all this. We were quite happy until you pushed in. Who the devil are you anyhow, and what the hell did you come for?"

"I smelt danger. Wherever danger is, there's Frank Dereham, sword in hand. A very gallant gentleman. Besides, I came to kill you. That, of course, was the principal reason. I came to run you through up the third rib. But don't let's talk of it now. I'll tell you everything to-morrow."

Culpeper did not answer. He was too weary to speak, and led the way into the Hermit's Head, Dereham following, with Damport lugging Dereham's box.

"No room, no room!" cried the landlord at seeing strangers. "I've got nowhere to sleep myself." And indeed, he was making himself a bed inside an empty barrel in one corner of the taproom.

Dereham pulled his purse from his sleeve and threw it at the man.

"You'll find me room somewhere," he said. "My sword follows that purse."

It was a well-filled purse, and the landlord immediately dug himself out of his barrel.

That was typical of Dereham: he overdid everything. He lived for the gesture, and robbed himself that he might appear great in his own eyes. A gold piece would have made the landlord his slave, yet he flung him a purse containing a dozen. And it was all the money he had in the world.

Beds were made of old rags under the taproom window, but it was long before Frank Dereham fell asleep. He lay stretched full-length beside the snoring Damport. He lay in shirt only, and he gazed up at the black roof through the darkness, gazed with dry eyes that did not seem to blink, his hands twisting together over his chest.

For hours he could not sleep.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Cæsar's Own

OUTSIDE POMFRET the next morning, in an open field, Dereham and Culpeper lay on the grass. None could hear their talk, save the birds and trees, and the great clouds moving their solemn pinions slowly over the vacant blue. They were the two human beings there, and could shout without fear if they willed; only the birds in the air and the busy insects under their bodies were living with them. But they did not shout, they talked quietly. Neither liked the other, but they hid their feelings because of the woman both loved.

"You said last night that you had come to kill me," said Culpeper, lying flat on his back and smiling at the sky. "I'm still alive."

"At the moment: but already that carcass of yours is bound for death." Dereham sat up and plucked the grass in handfuls. "I came to kill you," he said, "because whispers had come to me of your loving her. I strapped on sword and dagger, raging because you had imperilled her life. 'Young fools,' I thought, 'I must stop this: better he should die than that both should die.' So I came riding, worked up for murder. She's like a sister to me, and I felt that I must protect her from her own foolishness. She's such a child. Even now she doesn't understand the perils that cluster round a Queen."

"But you did nothing," said Culpeper.

"No, I did nothing. When I looked into her eyes and saw such happiness there, I felt that killing you wouldn't help. I am a fool. I don't know what to do.

Even at this moment I'm not sure if the best thing wouldn't be to poignard you as you lie beside me, but I don't do it. What can a man do against love? So I thought: 'Let them swive away the hours till death, I can't stop them; but being at her side I may perhaps hold them back a little way.'"

"You seem very certain of our dying," sneered Culpeper. "I'm not quite so certain."

"I am as certain of your death," said Dereham dispassionately, "as I am that this day must end. I'm outside your magic circle; I'm not blinded by passion. Don't you see that the reckless way you're going, the King *must* hear of it."

"I see nothing of the sort. And anyhow, if you're so certain, why do you stay with us? You've no reason to be here. If we must die, why must you die with us? I suppose you know that if we're caught, we won't be the only ones to suffer?"

"I know that, and I am prepared to die. Frank Dereham digs his own grave." He paused and bit his lip, twisting his heelless shoe into the turf. "Frank Dereham has faced death so often that it's like a friend to him," he muttered.

"For all your boasting," said Culpeper, "you haven't told me yet why you're staying."

"Put it down that I'm a madman," said Dereham bitterly, "just a noble, generous madman."

They were silent then, lying in that field, two brightly coloured figures on a vast bed of green, with the sky above them curled into clouds, and with the birds trilling prettily in the oak tree; they were silent, wrapped cosily in dreams of a woman's beauty, of her dark, drooping mouth and long coils of rust-red hair.

So far the progress—except for the rains at the beginning—had been a great success, and very shortly

they would reach the city of York, where Henry hoped his nephew, James of Scotland, would meet him. When, on the 17th of this month of August, they had entered the country of Yorkshire, four to five thousand gentlemen and yeomen had bent their knees before King Henry with an offering of £900 and a servile letter of submission. Henry had lovingly received his loyal subjects, and those who had been involved in the rebellion he left to kneel on the wet grass. After leaving the King's manor at Hatfield—where Morton had spied upon the Queen who spied on Culpeper—on the way to Pomfret, on the high ground at Barnsdale, not far north of where the rebels had camped during the Doncaster negotiations, the Archbishop and three hundred of his clergy had trooped out to offer the King £600. Altogether, it was a satisfactory progress for Henry. Every town he came to gave him some money in apologies for the rebellion; even the villages offered food, if they had nothing else; and every little added to the Privy Purse; Lincolnshire had done its part: £20 from Stamford, £40 from Lincoln, £50 from Boston, £300 from the division of Lindsey, £50 from the Chapter of Lincoln, and £50 from the division of Kesteven. York, Henry expected, would give him something really substantial. He was enjoying himself, and he liked this pretty town of Pomfret with its great castle towering against the sky, near where the gentle Aire and Calder embraced silkily, and on the roadway was the little spring called Robin Hood's Well, with a stone chair and an iron ladle next to it; although he was an outlaw, Henry felt affectionately towards Robin Hood because he had been a good hunter, just like Henry himself.

This morning he came into the Queen's Presence Chamber in the Castle, the jester at his side, as always. Wherever Henry went nowadays, Will Sommers followed him, head cocked on one side, listening,

watching, a monkey gathering words and looks and storing them for a secret purpose.

He stood aside while Kate petitioned her husband to appoint Dereham as her Secretary, but he heard every word.

"An old servant of the family's," she said. "And in the old days he did all my writing for me. I like to have friends near me. Besides, now that Will Paget is made Clerk of the Parliaments and you are sending him to France next month, I have nobody to send letters by."

Henry agreed at once. She could have whatever she wished, this jewel of his, this jewel of womanhood.

As she was thanking him, Dereham himself entered, walked in with his head in air and his cloak flung back over one shoulder. Dereham did not walk so much as strut. He hadn't a gesture that did not smack of careful rehearsing. He was somehow flamboyant, a trifle ostentatious.

"So that's the lad?" said the King, quizzing him good-humouredly. "Why, he's as tall as I am! Run to him, Will, and bring him here."

Sommers rushed off eagerly. He pushed through the women and courtiers, and flung his arms around Dereham's neck, although he had to jump to do so.

"Turn, man, turn!" he cried. "The King is calling. Marry, you are an oak amongst weeds! How grew you so tall and so handsome?"

"The better to serve my King," said Dereham, who was determined to be the courtier and to miss no chance of a pretty or a witty phrase. "So that my arm might be strong in defence and swift to attack, to make myself as loyal a subject as M. Bayart made the King of France."

"We aren't at war, man! And the King has a beard, he is no wench to sigh for pretty subjects." Sommers tapped him familiarly on the chest. "You are too handsome a man to use a pen for women. I'd have you in the kitchen if I was master."

"Who are you?" asked Dereham. "You look no courtier and talk like no servant; you have a fine wit and vile clothes."

"Because my clothes were stitched by a tailor and my wit was given me by God. I am Will Sommers, who brings sunlight into dark corners. But we must not keep my old friend Harry waiting—Harry, the only Harry in all England. Be careful how you behave before him, don't wipe your nose nor spit when you talk."

"I will be careful," said Dereham gravely.

Sommers gripped him by the arm and pushed through the crowd, shouting, "Away, aware, room for me and my friend, room for me and my friend: and, knaves, bid him welcome."

Everybody cried "Welcome! welcome!" until the two men reached the King, who was talking with his Queen, apart.

"What were you talking of?" demanded Henry. "You're the worst messenger man ever had, Will boy. When I command a thing, do it without gabbling and jangling."

"I couldn't let him appear before my Harry without telling him how to behave, could I? Besides, I wished to see if he was as high as you, and he is full two inches shorter, being a dutiful subject."

"Ay, you have a fine figure," said Henry, as Dereham dropped on both knees before him. "I am not God, man!" he cried. "One knee to me. Up with you so that I may see how tall you are. Ay, a fine figure."

"Shorter by a cow's horn," said Sommers under his breath.

"I wish I were a lad again so that we might break our bones together," said Henry sadly, "but my wrestling days are over."

"I would they were not so, Your Highness. I would

indeed be proud to prove how stronger Your Highness was than I."

"You are humble—or are you just a courtier—like the rest?"

"I am humble, Your Highness, before those I reverence. Your Highness's prowess at all games is England-wide. There is no man in all your realm to equal you."

"Would it were so still." The colour crept into Henry's cheeks, his eyes took on a softer gold as he recalled old triumphs. "Ah, boy!" he cried. "God gives man no greater pleasure than to feel a horse between his thighs and a lance in his fist! My jousting days are gone. I am good for little now but archery and hunting. How are you with the bow?"

"I have been told, Your Highness, that few men can cleave the pin as clean as I at two-forty yards."

"We must test our strength at that. If I were but your age again!" He stood silent then, feeling very old and rather wretched. All that glory was gone now; never again would he know the delight of feeling how strong he was when the lance crackled up or his adversary was catapulted over his horse's rump. The room, the Queen, Will Sommers, Dereham, and the courtiers and women, all were gone: he felt again the heat inside his helmet, the cold air through the visor stinging his eyes, could see the dust and sand churned up from the ground under the horse's hoofs, and hear the sudden quietness of the watchers as, heads lowered, lances at rest, the two men spurred forward their horses each side of the wooden tilt; then the hungry roar as the lances split to fragments or a man was thrust over his cantle to fall clattering in the sand. Was there any thrill in all the world like it? . . . It wasn't fair that a man should grow old who had once been the strongest man in England, lifting a two-handed sword in one great hand. But it wasn't age, it was this damned leg, caused by that fall. . . .

"Yes, yes," he said wearily, his eyes still blank with dreams, their gaze fixed on the tapestried walls, "we must try our skill with the bow. You will wait upon her grace as Mr. Secretary. Mr. Baynton will give you your instructions."

Bowing, Dereham walked backwards from King and Queen, and they were still silent after the crowd had hidden him. Kate and Sommers both watched the King, wondering what secret was hidden by those golden eyes that were opaque as if he were blind.

Sir Edward Baynton, the Queen's Vice-Chamberlain, and Lady Isabel's husband, had evidently heard all about Dereham from his wife. He was very insulting when Dereham called upon him in his apartments, and somehow Dereham kept his temper. Sir Edward was tired, he said, tired of being pestered by hangers-on, he had a lot of work to do, too much work in this accursed progress.

"You must leave it all until we get back to Hampton Court," he said. "Of course, I can't stop you from waiting on the Queen, and if you've the King's permission, as you say you have, you can act as her secretary. It's an easy task, you won't have much to do. I can't give you any bouge at Court while we're in this muddle. You'll have to eat and lodge outside, where you can: and you can't get any money until the Court of Augmentations makes up its books. That'll be at the end of the year. You can eat with Mr. Jones's mess when we get back to Court. Now I can do nothing for you, nothing whatever. You can go."

And he insolently turned his back on Dereham.

Dereham was actually only too delighted not to be lodged in the Castle, and he returned to the Hermit's Head to eat a hearty dinner; then, with Damport, he sat drinking all afternoon.

Once they strolled upstairs to seek Culpeper, but he

had gone out to avoid them. On the table was the book he had been reading, Hawes's *Pastime of Pleasure*.

"This is the muck he reads," scoffed Dereham, seizing the book and opening it at random. "Yesterday, Bob, you asked me what poets wrote about. You'll find no hymns here except to my Lady Venus. Listen, lad:

Oh, earth on earth, it is a wondrous case
That thou art blind and will not thee know,
Though upon earth thou hast thy dwelling-place,
Yet earth at last must needs thee overthrow.
Thou thinkest thee do be none earth, I trow,
For if thou didst thou wouldst then apply
To forsake pleasure and to learn to die . . .

Bah!" snarled Dereham, flinging the book down, "to learn to die! What need is there to teach a man that?"

"I thought you said it was all about women," complained Damport. "There's no women in that. Just the kind of thing that the priest talks to you about. How to buy Masses. I always knew poetry wasn't anything to do with love."

"Some poetry is. But the best verse on earth is stoppered in a cask. Buy another drink, Bob."

"If you hadn't given all your money to that damn'd landlord . . ."

"I'll get more, you miserly hound. To learn to die! Earth on earth, eh, Bob! We'll turn our earth to clay with Rhenish!"

WHILE Dereham drank, Culpeper dreamed. It was so easy after all, he thought, this loving a Queen.

Day followed day at Pomfret where the Court lingered, and night after night at Pomfret Culpeper held the Queen in his arms. They forgot all dangers. They were lulled by their own embracements. It

didn't seem possible to them that any danger could lurk without that little room, the Queen's bed-chamber. Perhaps it was the presence of Dereham that made them reckless, for Dereham when with Kate refused to consider any possible cause for worry : with Culpeper, he talked of nothing but " to learn to die." He forced Culpeper into Kate's arms as often as possible with a kind of grim rage, and he would stride the courtyard or the street, keeping guard (for which there was no conceivable necessity, for danger would come from within the Castle, not from without), his naked sword tucked under his arm. He got a kind of perverted delight in Culpeper's being with Kate, standing off to admire his own colossal generosity and unselfishness.

Once, pricked on by Morton's dark mutterings, Kate, in an access of terror, insisted that the King had laid a trap for them, but the proof that they were wholly unsuspected made her more reckless than ever.

They met in her bedroom, with both the back door and the door into her Privy Chamber locked and bolted from within.

But when Morton or Fryswide or another of the chamberers refused to leave the bed-chamber, Kate fled to Lady Jane and trysted with Culpeper in dark corners, once meeting in a green-cushioned place that was the vilest part of the palace.

Culpeper strode out afterwards into the street, shuddering as the cool night wind brushed his hot forehead. He had not realised at the time the full horror of their surroundings, but now in retrospect the memory almost made him retch, and he longed to bathe to get the odours out of his hair, out of the very pores of his skin.

When he told Dereham, that giant roared with laughter. He doubled up in the roadway and shook from head to foot as he leaned on his sword.

" And so it is right," he cried, " that heaven on

earth should come to you in a jakes! There is a symbol there, man, a symbol of love. Ajax defies the lightning wrath of God, and stinks. What is your love really worth when you must steal it amidst the filth of mankind! A fitting place to naught it in, a fitting place indeed!"

"The most unfitted place in the world," said Culpeper through his teeth, growing angry and regretting that he had told the fellow about it.

"Nay, you misunderstand me. I don't mean that love is vile. I mean the opposite, that it's so heavenly that it needs vileness about it to prove that bodies are only earth after all."

"You're mad," said Culpeper.

THEY were all mad, those days at Pomfret.

Once Culpeper was called to wait upon the King, and Henry, who liked him much, fondled him as he heaved himself out of bed.

"Why haven't I seen you, boy?" he cried. "Who's the traitorous wench that keeps you from your duty to your King?"

"No, your grace, I have no wench."

"Yet you haven't slept in my Privy Chamber for months! Where do you sleep? Is she a pretty creature?"

"I tell you, your grace . . ."

"No lies to me, boy. I can see by your blushes that I've probed your heart. Why don't you grow a beard? I don't like men with naked faces. Why, lad, there's no harm in loving, no shame. Tell me your heart. I would that all my subjects could be as merry and as loving as I."

He sat on the cushioned stool while Sir Anthony Browne and Sir John Russel pulled off his bed-socks and put on daytime stockings, smoothing out the creases and gartering them firmly under the knees.

The gentlemen fussed about him in the morning task of dressing the King: off with the scarlet nightcap, and the bald, pointed head was exposed, pink and disproportionate; the barber, John Penne, stood near by, a page beside him holding his basin containing rose-scented water, and one of the grooms held a cup of wine—three parts water—ready for when it should be called.

As he was being dressed, the King talked to Culpeper with the delight of age in embarrassing youth.

"It's not treason to love," he said with a laugh. "If so, I'd have scarce a subject in the land. There'd be no King either. If I could, I'd have you all as loving as turtles together, for a man in love has no time for plotting. If all the years were spring without a stop, and all his subjects were cooing lovers, a King'd have a merry time of it, indeed! Come, lad, tell us all about her."

"I tell you, your grace, that you are mistaken . . ."

"Has he not a guilty look, Norfolk! see how he blushes like a maid caught on a stile! Ah, what wouldn't you and I do, man, to be as young again and as innocent as he!"

Norfolk, who was taking the King's doublet from the groom, turned with a smile that had no humour in it. "I have no regrets," he said. "I've shed my foolishness, your grace, and have learned wisdom."

"No man learns wisdom, Norfolk; that proves indeed that you are old. You're nearly seventy, aren't you? I am but fifty, and I tell you that I'd shed everything I've learned to be able to blush like this lad. . . . No, I don't want my doublet on yet, I want my beard trimmed first. Come, John."

John Penne took scissors, towels, and comb from the page, and carefully draped the cloth about the King's throat; the scissors had a powerful spring, and with them Penne made little darting plunges at the King's

golden beard like a bird pecking at a bush, and after every plunge of the hand he circled the scissors aloft and clipped them noisily in the air, as if chirping with delight.

"But I have learned enough," said Henry, turning his head this way, that way, at the loving pressure of the barber's fingers, "enough, anyhow, to be able to advise this moonstruck lad a little. Before you marry, Tom, you must let me see your wench. I'd not like to see earth made hateful to you by a villainous wife. I know too well the dangers of that. You want a pure wench, no light-brained creature who knows too well the tickle of grass on her neck. She must be clean and virginal,

And, son, if thou wilt have a wife
Take her not for covetise,
But wisely enquire of all her life
And take good heed by my advise
That she be courteous, meek, and wise.

If she's been a loose-liver her limbs grow as loose as her mind. That's a sure sign of naughtiness, and her mouth should not be too lax at a kiss, should be firm and cool, nor should she swagger like a man, but jet it with mincing jaunty steps, swinging her hips and not the legs, one foot's toes behind the other foot's heel, her legs chafing each other at every step. Come to me, lad, for advice: I'm like the unicorn and can be caught only by virginal charm. I'll teach you infallible signs by which you can see at a glance whether a girl's life's been true or not."

He moved his head from side to side as he talked, liking the feel of the barber fumbling his cheeks. But now the beard was trimmed round and curved. He looked at it in the glass mirror upheld by the kneeling page, and he sighed at seeing the jagged streaks of white in the gold.

"You mustn't stay away too often, boy," he said, rising and leaning on Master Norris's shoulder as he hobbled off to that green-cushioned chamber similar to the chamber that last night Culpeper had kissed his Kate in.

"He is too kind, too good a man," said Culpeper, sitting down wearily on the form next to Dereham who was lounging behind the inn, watching his horse being exercised by a bored hostler. "This morning he talked to me of women, advising me how to tell the white sheep from the black: it nearly broke my heart."

"If he can't hold her," said Dereham, "he deserves to lose her. Look at that horse of mine! isn't he a beauty! I bought him out of my winnings at sea. Always give me a bay; your sorrel may be more of a snorter and a hoof-beater, but for real strength, give me a bay!"

"He told me ways of being sure of purity, gave me hints how to tell how good a maid's life had been. I could have wept, I felt so bad!" Culpeper groaned and put his face in his hands. "If only he was a brute, I could bear it more."

Dereham turned from his admiration of the proud bay to look with cold, cruel eyes upon the man beside him.

"He told you tricks, did he, on how to tell a maiden?" Dereham laughed harshly. "Let him keep the tricks to use himself. I've found no way of learning that, and never has any man. I've no pity for the old fool!"

"Don't call him names!" Culpeper glared at him. "He's been splendid to me. I owe him more than I can ever say."

"You owe him for a pretty wench, and later you can pay him with your head. If you get like this, why don't you leave her alone?"

"I think . . . I almost feel I will. . . ."

"What?" Dereham swung round. "What's that you say?"

"I say I'll leave her. I can't bear this any longer. I'm going slowly mad. I'm going mad. I'll never be happy again. He's so kind to me, so good."

"A fine lover!" sneered Dereham. "You're going on with it now. You can't stop without breaking her heart, and by God, man, I won't let you break it!"

"Would you command me! God's wounds, you presume too far! I'll do what I wish, and you won't stop me!"

"No?" said Dereham. "I can't stop you, I can only kill you. I am a fool, one part of me is urging me to let you go, and the other part—the noble part, the real Francis Dereham—says: Make him stay. I will be noble. That is my nature. Therefore, I will not let you creep away like a coward now that you've satisfied your little lusts. Why do women always choose curs?"

"I'm no cur! You'll eat that, Dereham! I've had enough of your bullying! I've only stood it because of her!"

"Then prove that you aren't a cur!"

"I'm ready any day, this minute, as soon as my sword can leave its sheath!"

"That's not a brave man's way; any fool can be brave in anger. Prove that you're no coward by standing beside the woman you've ruined now that she's in danger."

"I love her still; it's not that. . . ."

Dereham laughed and kicked at the dust. "You love her, yet you can leave her because your conscience suddenly sprouts thorns! I don't call that love!"

"I'm not leaving her. I never meant to leave her. It was only for a moment. Why can't you understand? Haven't you any conscience at all?"

"Only towards those I love or respect. I wouldn't hurt that bay of mine, for example—not for forty hundred crowns!"

"Do you put a horse higher than a man?"

"A hundred times higher. I put only one thing above my horse—a woman. . . ."

THERE was no withdrawing. And he loved her still. It was his conscience that begged him to draw back, not lack of love. My God, she was fire in his heart. She had bound him, put burning chains around his heart as La Belle Pucelle had bound the heart of Grand Amour in Hawes's verse. "The chain she hauled which my heart did bind. . . ." And at her every movement, at every flicker of her eyelids over the blue eyes, his heart was jarred in his chest, being bound by that "brenninge chayne." And Dereham dared to say that he didn't love her! Why didn't he kill the man? Kate seemed to like him, and she would be angry at his death. No, he couldn't kill him.

He was walking along a narrow street at this moment, just behind a bedizened merchant's wife, her old-fashioned train tucked over her arm, with two men-servants striding ahead of her; and suddenly he stopped quite still, and was jostled by the crowds; but he did not heed them. For he had suddenly thought: The man's in love with her!

It came as a great revelation and explained everything. Dereham was in love with Kate!

Culpeper smiled as he continued his walk, and the merchant's wife, who had paused to gaze at the feminine fripperies on a toy-shop's stall, tossed her head, the two men-servants twisted their brows at him; but he did not see them. He passed them, still smiling, his gaze fixed on nothing.

He loved her. Of course he loved her. Had he not said that he had ridden to Pomfret, loosening his sword

in the hanger? He loved the Queen, and at the first whisper of her frailty, the hungry dog had come bounding for his share of the cate . . . the cate. Culpeper laughed aloud at the pun, bad as it was. She was indeed a cate, as she herself had said, sweet and warm and delicious to taste, still more delicious in retrospect.

The rat had come for his nibble and now wanted to provoke a fight, wanted to get him, Culpeper, out of the way so that he could have her for himself.

The thought drove away Culpeper's bad temper, made him feel quite happy. How he must writhe at night! He'd rub it into him more, give him details of her love-making, he'd make the rat squirm, by God!

THEREFORE it was with a merrier heart that Culpeper crept up the back stairs of the Castle that night and entered the Queen's own bed-chamber. In the street, Dereham kept his naked sword under his arm, on guard, twisting with jealousy.

He'd make him twist! . . .

Each kiss was balm to Culpeper, for each kiss must be like hot iron to Dereham.

"How I love you!" whispered Culpeper into Kate's hidden ear. She was built of moonlight, soft mauve with purple-black shadows. "How is it you aren't crazed with your own beauty?" he murmured. "I can't understand women. They're basilisks and turn us men to slave with a blow of their eyes, kill us at their feet: but even the basilisk is captured if it sees itself. I'd have thought every mirror was a woman's death-trap."

"When eyes are mirrors, we are captured. I can only see myself in glass or steel not as myself but as I'll look to you." She held him tightly. "I must never lose you now!" she cried.

"Never! I am so jealous of every minute I'm away from you. I'm jealous even of the King!"

She laughed gently, twisting his ear and gazing into his eyes. "No need to be jealous there!" she scoffed. "You know what George Bullen read out in Court? It was true. I hardly ever see him. We haven't bedded now for months and months."

"How can he keep away from you? He loves you, he couldn't help but love you!"

"Men grow old."

"But you're an elixir that'd drag me out of my grave. I could die loving you. He hasn't called for you? That's true?"

"Before Christ, love, it is true."

They snuggled contentedly together. He could hear her heart fluttering, and turned her over. She rolled laxly as if her body were disjointed, loose yet heavy with love. He leaned down to kiss her open mouth, her warm mouth with its drooping under-lip. . . .

"Ah, if I could only hold you thus, always and always!"

"Always, love!"

THEY went suddenly stiff, as if frozen. They dared not move, but gripped each other fiercely, yet neither feeling pain, neither feeling anything but swooning terror as that rapping came gently on the door leading into her Privy Chamber. They could not even speak. They gazed at each other as if, in truth, they were both basilisks trapped by each other's eyes: unblinkingly, they looked at each other, not a tremor in their bodies. They were lifeless, wooden, in each other's arms.

"Your grace, your grace!" The voice was tearful. "Open the door, your grace. It's His Highness. Master Dane of the Privy Chamber is here!"

Suddenly, Kate came alive. She pushed Culpeper away and leaped on to the floor, fumbling for night-gown and slippers. She couldn't find her slippers anywhere. Where had she kicked them to? Ah, there

was the gown! She wrapped it around her shoulders, and the satin felt terribly cold, alien. One slipper she noticed half under the bed, pounced on it and tried to drag it on to her foot, but in her agitation she caught her toes in the ribbon.

"Your grace, for God's sake, your grace! Mr. Dane's getting furious!"

The other slipper was on the stool. She put it on, seized a comb, and swiftly ran it through her hair, shaking the long red tresses from her forehead. In the moonlight she peered at herself in the hand-mirror—shaking in every limb she was—and hurriedly smeared a little red into her cheeks from a jar.

She saw Culpeper's pale face behind her. He caught her by the shoulders and she swung round and kissed him with passionate fury.

"Mr. Dane won't wait if you don't come. Please, please, your grace, wake up, open the door!"

Kate moved her mouth from Culpeper's to cry: "I'm coming, Morton, I'm coming," then kissed him eagerly again, pressing both hands to his cheeks.

"Run quick, love, quick," she cried, tearing herself from his arms. "To-morrow night."

She waited until he had fled down the backstairs, then yawning and stretching herself, she opened the door into the Privy Chamber, revealing a collection of weeping women, some dressed fully, some in night-attire, some naked, but all white with fear and anxiety.

"Thank God," sighed Marget Morton.

"I was asleep," said the Queen. "Tell Mr. Dane I will be with him in a moment. Make me beautiful. Quickly!"

PAGES and grooms before her, lighting the way with spluttering torches, her women around her, Mr. Anthony Dane of the King's Privy Chamber following

a few steps behind, the Queen walked with a Queen's dignity towards the King's apartments.

And in the Queen's bed-chamber, Kath Tylney, white-faced, was gazing at pillows that showed the impress of two heads, and looking with eyes like saucers at a strand of the Queen's blood-red hair twisted with a short, stiff, black hair that could only have come from a man's cropped head. . . .

The passages had been cleared to make way for the Queen. She walked through the King's rooms and looked neither to the right nor the left, her green nightgown was twisted up to her throat, hiding a body that was quivering and was icy-cold.

The yeomen ushers and waiters bowed low as she passed, and they smiled together as they bobbed up when she was by. In the Privy Chamber the pallet-beds for the pages and gentlemen had been made, and Mr. Dane stepped ahead to open the door of the bed-chamber.

The Queen stood waiting for the door to open, and in her heart was such a feeling of utter shame and abasement that she felt that any minute she might retch with horror. She felt constricted, ready to burst out sweating or to swoon, so terrible was her shame.

Mr. Anthony Dane flung open the door, and bowed. The pages and grooms stood aside. Her women dropped behind her a little. And taking a deep breath like one entering a pestiferous hothouse from the open air, the Queen walked boldly into that dark chamber lit only by the faint night-light on the projecting ledge of the bed, and she heard the door shut behind her, shutting her in.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

On with the Progress

WHEN HE CREPT INTO THE STREET that night, Culpeper was so torn with jealousy that he could not bear the thought of speaking to Dereham. He who had gloated on the idea of taunting Dereham, was himself the one now racked with jealousy.

"She's gone to the King," he stuttered, when Dereham pressed him for details. "The King called her and she went. She went from my arms into his. I sneaked out of the back door, because he called her. How can women do things like that? how could she bear to go to him? The thought of another woman now makes me ill."

"All pity then to her," said Dereham soberly. "You should be weeping, not for your pain, but for hers."

"Do you think, do you think she's suffering?"

Dereham glared at him. "Suffering!" he cried. "My God, she must be in hell!"

Curiously, the thought of Kate being in hell consoled Culpeper. It was the idea that she might be enjoying the King's caresses that angered him. With all the selfishness of a lover, he felt relieved as he entered the Hermit's Head, with Dereham at his heels.

He wanted to be alone, to luxuriate in his self-pity, but he was back earlier to-night than usual, and Charles Howard—who still shared his room and bed—was awake when he came in. Howard poked his dark face through the curtains at the sound of Culpeper's entrance. "Early to-night?" he said in a merry tone. "Did the husband come back suddenly? or the father? You've a bold wench, Master Culpeper. Every night so far this week you've been out late. Who is she?"

Culpeper could not help smiling. He felt a strong impulse to shout at this mincing gallant, "Your sister, damn you!" and see the supercilious leer leave those eyes as they widened in horror, see the painted face turn bloodless; but he held his tongue, and turned away to unhook the inside of his doublet from his breeches.

"You can't expect me to tell you that," he said.

"So she's high up, is she? Not just a tavern-wench? A Court lady?"

Culpeper pulled off his doublet and sat on a stool to untie the ribbons that bound the breeches-lining to the puce stockings.

"Ay," he said, "a Court lady. You'll learn no more from me."

"A Court lady?" repeated Howard, lying back on the bed. "I wonder who she is! Isn't it queer to think that to-morrow when I pay my respects to my sister, one of the women about her will have been playing the naught with you! I'll see no difference in her. Your lips won't have left marks, if you've been careful. She'll be as prim as if she were born in her whalebone. I can't understand women: you can never tell what's behind their faces. Come on, Culpeper, tell me her name. I won't let it go farther."

"I won't tell you," said Culpeper.

"Don't be a mean cur, men ought to tell each other things like that. I'll never let a soul know. It'd make me merry if I could look at the prude to-morrow and think: You'd slap my face, you would, if you knew what I knew about you."

"I won't tell," repeated Culpeper, putting out the light and leaping into bed. "Move over. You seem to be all legs and elbows."

"All right." Howard lounged over towards the plaster wall, and yawned. "If you want to be mean about it, you can go to hell."

Culpeper did not answer. It seemed droll to him at

the moment that her brother should be sleeping in bed with him. What would the man do if he had the slightest inkling? His dagger would be out, or he'd hire bravos to corner Culpeper in a dark lane, to revenge his sister's honour. And Culpeper smiled to think how frenzied brothers were in upholding their sisters' honour and how cynical they were about the honour of other men's sisters. And how was her honour injured if none knew of it? And none would know of it. . . .

A sudden spasm of jealousy seized him and made him shut his eyes on the musty bed-curtains. She was with him now, with the King, her husband. . . .

"For the devil's sake!" shouted Charles Howard. "Lie still, damn you! You twist like a cut worm!"

BEFORE Mass, the next morning, Culpeper went to wait upon his King as he had done the morning before. This had been his task in the old days. Six gentlemen of the Privy Chamber were alone permitted to dress the King, and now Culpeper had been commanded to be one of the six. No other men were allowed into the pallet-room—the bed-chamber—except the barber and his page, two gentlemen ushers, and four grooms. They entered the room at six o'clock usually, or at whatever hour the King last night had required them to come: the grooms opened the windows and, in winter, lit the fires; they put a fresh layer of rushes over the dead ones, and carried away any dirt or remains of food that might be lying around. The two gentlemen ushers guarded the door, letting none enter save those who had a right to do so, and they watched that the grooms did their work swiftly and thoroughly. The six gentlemen were there to dress the King, his clothes being brought to them from the Wardrobe by the clerk, who delivered them at the door to the grooms, who gave them to whatever gentleman was disengaged at the

moment. Two of these gentlemen slept all night in the bed-chamber on pallets, except when the King wished to be alone (as he had last night), when they slept in the Privy Chamber with some of the pages and waiters.

Culpeper was on time. He arrived just on six o'clock when the King was getting up, yawning and blinking, while Sir Anthony Browne was putting the slippers on his feet.

Henry was very merry this morning and chaffed his gentlemen. Will Sommers, who had right of entrance anywhere, strolled in with his monkey on his back, and made the King roar with delight by acting the lover with his pet.

Culpeper bowed and began to hook the King's breeches on to his doublet.

"Why, boy, you look ill this morning!" cried the King, pausing in his laughter to gaze with concern at Culpeper. "How drawn your face is! how strained and bloodshot your eyes! You are suffering! I am sorry if I hurt you yestermorn. I thought it was but a wilful kissing-match and didn't know it was so very serious. She has been cruel to you?"

"Your grace," said Culpeper in a harsh voice, "I plead your mercy. I am not well."

"Only love could make a man look so vile. These hard-hearted wenches, Satan's curse on them! Yet remember, lad, that the harder she be to you now in courtship, the sweeter she'll be after marriage. If she's been cruel to you, be sure she's been so to all men. It is better to marry than to burn, said that wise, holy man, St. Paul. Ah, but it is a terrible thing to love unloved, to be gripped by 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'!

And ye ladies, or what estate ye be,
In whom worship hath chose his dwelling-place,
For God is love, do no such cruelty,
Namely to them that have deserved grace,

Nor in no wise now follow ye not the trace
Of her that is named rightwisely
Which by reason, it seemeth in this case,
May be called 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'!

But, boy, you must not mistake those who are cruel from hard-heartedness with those who love their honour too much to love man without the Church's blessing."

"I will remember, your grace." The last hook slipped into its eye, Culpeper stood back, thankful to escape the King's proximity, and as he stepped back, he glanced at the bed, his eyes drawn towards it by some perverted demon within him, for he had sworn not to gaze that way. He saw the clothes swung back, and saw the twisted cavities in the green silk pillows where two heads had lain close together.

He set his teeth at the sight, and shuddered.

The King missed very little, and he saw that glance of Culpeper's, but fortunately he completely misinterpreted it. He smiled kindlily. "Yes," he said, sighing, "marriage, my boy, is the only end to man. It is the seventh sacrament and the sweetest in God's sight. Your wenches that you grab in dark corners are as nothing to the bride who blushes as the torches are dashed out. I have sought always for this happiness that God has blessed me with at last. Ah, nothing can compare with the jewel of wedded bliss, nothing, nothing. I wish you could all be as happy as I!"

Culpeper turned away, ashamed yet cold with jealousy; he turned to find Will Sommers gazing at him with large, inquiring eyes.

"We start to-day, your grace?" asked Norfolk. "Delay has been long enough. You are agreed with what you said yestermorn?"

The King shrugged himself out of his dreams. "Yes, yes, to-day," he said; "what is the next big town?"

"Cawood, your grace," said Norfolk.

Culpeper stopped himself from crying out. For the moment he could not believe what was said. It had seemed to him, besotted with love, that they would be never leaving Pomfret where the backstairs ran so conveniently up into the Queen's bedchamber, and now they might never again find a place so fitted as this. And to-night he would not see her, after all! He did so want to see her, to hear her reassure him, to hear her lie to him and tell him that last night nothing had happened.

And now he would not be seeing her until God knew when. . . .

White with jealousy and despair, he strode into the roadway and walked straight into Tom Paston. They gazed at each other as if they were strangers; both opened their mouths to speak, then both walked quickly on.

Curse the man, thought Culpeper; he is afraid that even my words might bring death on him, as if death mattered! As if anything were as important as the pain of living!

He told Dereham, and Dereham merely smiled.

"We are desperate men," he said, "and will find desperate remedies. I'll find a way. Never worry until you spit yourself on the other man's sword. Cawood might be even better than here."

It delighted him to find that a barrier had come between the lovers, but he beat down his pleasure. He'd do his best for them. They hadn't long to live—of that he was sure—so let Kate steal what happiness she could from life before all life was lost to her. He felt very noble, very honourable, as if by some generous act of his they were permitted to love, forgetting that she had loved Culpeper before he came to Court, and that he could have done nothing to stop the affair,

except to murder Culpeper. Nevertheless, he felt every inch a brave and honest gentleman as he waited on the Queen that morning in her Presence Chamber.

He had left Culpeper twisted with anxiety : every look, every gesture, revealing the agony in his heart ; and he found Kate seemingly unchanged. And he marvelled, as so many men have marvelled, at women's amazing power of dismissing unpleasant things and of acting a chosen part. Nobody to look at her would have thought that she was raging with shame. She looked an innocent girl ; within, she was a degraded creature who loathed herself.

Nobody but she and her ladies were there this morning, for all were making ready to continue the progress to York. The women were seeing that their clothes were packed without creases, and wrapping up treasured useless knick-knacks, and Kate had to be called by one of the grooms from her Privy Chamber when Dereham arrived.

"Ah, Frank," she murmured, "thank God you've come." Restlessly, she caressed his strong hand, then dropped it as she noticed that she was watched, as always. "I don't know what to do," she moaned. "I was to have seen Master Culpeper to-night, but now in all this hurry of moving, I mightn't see him for weeks."

"We'll find a way," said he, with a confidence that he did not feel.

"You will help, won't you, Frank? God bless you, you are so good to me!"

He paused before he spoke again, airily, "And can you help me, Kate?" he asked. "I haven't a groat in the world, and you, being Queen . . ."

"Of course I will, Frank! I'll get you something to-morrow. I haven't much, you know, even though I am Queen, plenty of jewels and clothes, but little minted gold. I'll get something, though. Why here, you might get something on this, to carry you on."

From her sleeve she took a small gold coin and pressed it into his palm.

"Thank you, my dear," he said, and looked at the coin, for it was unfamiliar to him. On one side was stamped the royal arms of England flanked with *H R*, under the regal diadem. On the other side was a rose, crowned, flanked with *K R*, with these words: *Henricus VIII. Rutilans Rosa Sine Spina.* "Why," he said, "what's this? K R, Katharine Regina, and a rose without a thorn! What's it about?"

She flushed. "The King had them struck in my honour," she said, "when we married. That is what he calls me. His 'rose without a thorn.'"

"I can't keep this!"

"You must, Frank, there were hundreds of them made. I've got a boxful. I'll never forget all I owe you. Do you remember the sarcenet you gave me for a cap? and I had Mr. Rose make it up with friars' knots, and when you saw it you cried, 'What! here be friars' knots for Francis!' jesting because of the naughty meaning King Francis had given to friars' knots and pansy flowers! How things come back to me!"

"And to me," he murmured sadly.

"But I am Queen now!" She laughed without merriment. "And you will have more than your sarcenet given back to you with its knots and silk pansies. And you never took back any of the hundred pounds you left with me to look after when you first went a-pirating. I have much I owe you, Frank."

"You owe me nothing, but if you can lend me a few pounds . . ."

"You'll have all I can get. But we must do something!" she cried suddenly. "Make that wise head of yours work, Frank; think up some way, for I must see him to-night or to-morrow night, or I will die. And tell him, Frank, that—that what George Bullen said of the King in court is truer than ever!"

"I'll tell him. But to me, Kate, what do you say? Is it true?"

She shuddered. "O God," she said, "pity me. It is not true!"

EVERYWHERE was bustle, people making ready for the progress to continue its way to York; Will Sommers had little or nothing to pack, and he sought out Mr. Harman.

"Master Harman," said he slyly, "things grow worse and worse. There is another man in it now, a great brute of a man, and she has the two of them. Never was Babylon so vile as this Court of ours!"

Mr. Harman played with the gold chain at his throat and shook his greying head, smiling.

"Nay, Sommers," said he, "I no longer think that evil."

"What, man, are you mad! I don't suspect, I *know*!"

"What do you know?"

"That the Squire was kept waiting last night when he called for her, because her door was both locked and bolted from within." He gazed warily around him in fear of listeners. "Every day it grows worse and worse, and I'm the only man in all the Court who realises it!"

"You look for evil: that's why you find it."

"It's pushed under my nose. Soon, very soon, all England'll know it."

"You would tell?" Mr. Harman grasped Sommers tightly by the wrist. "I don't believe it," he said, "but even if it was true, you'd tell about it?"

"Nay, I'd not usurp God's judgment. What am I but a little pismire on the heap! I watch and I listen and I weep, but I talk to none by myself, you, and my monkey. Myself I trust because I am wise, you I trust because your heart is good, and my monkey I trust because he can only squeal and jangle wordlessly. I tell no one else, but the secret begins to blow up inside

me like a bladder. Oh, what fools men are, what fools! The older I grow the less purpose I see in life."

"The older you grow the more foolish you become," said Mr. Harman.

"So you desert our pact?"

"It was no pact. We were foolish with imaginings, for which there was no reason. Don't burn me with your nasty secrets, Will Sommers. I want to read the Good Book and not to ponder on the visible world, but only on the miracles that the Lord creates within us. Don't trouble me again."

"Then I am alone?" said Sommers.

He leaned against the tapestries and picked at the gold thread. He felt very miserable, and held back the tears only with a physical effort.

"I should have been a monk," he thought, now that his lovely wife was dead, "shut in behind stone walls, learning and reading old manuscripts and striving after God. I am not of this world, it hurts me. It shames me with its vanities. I would I were shut up in a cell with God, never seeing any one but my brethren, reading nothing but good works and speaking to none but to Him who died so horribly on the Cross. Why wasn't I a monk?"

A vile wilderness the world seemed to him, a wilderness in which grew nothing but weeds and thorns. He felt that if only he could dig through without being scratched to pieces, beyond it all was that ultimate sunset of the peace of God's love, of His compassionate understanding of little man. But hedged in in this wilderness, in this world that Satan was gradually conquering, Sommers felt that God was a very, very long way off, that even His great heart had tired of sorrowing and of forgiving, and that He had hidden His face behind the golden pillars of His Temple.

"Ah, God!" groaned Sommers, "Ah, God, why hast Thou forsaken us!"

PART FIVE

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Progress is over

On 23rd October the homeward-bound progress stopped at Ampthill and was at Hampton Court by the next day. It had been a quite successful affair, for Henry's Privy Purse had needed a little fresh blood; but the main reason, that of seeing James, King of Scotland, had never come about. There had been preparations at York for this meeting: nearly one thousand five hundred workmen had toiled day and night to furnish St. Leonard's Priory, just outside York, and innumerable tents had been hoisted, pavilions rapidly put together; all to no purpose. Nobody had been really sure what the fuss was about: some said it was to welcome James, others said it was for the coronation of the Queen who—so rumour insisted, wrongly as it often did—was about to produce a bonny boy to be entitled Duke of York; as neither of these events occurred, and the tents and pavilions were left for the beggars and small boys and dogs to destroy, everything remained as dark as ever. Nevertheless, it had all been very pretty and very exciting to the York people, who cheered their King as lustily as if such a thing as a rebellion had never been heard of. Henry stayed twelve days at the city, and made a proclamation that any one who had failed to get justice out of the Council of the North might meet him without embarrassment and talk things over; and twice, for a few hurried

hours, Culpeper and the Queen had had frenzied meetings, engineered by Dereham.

After despairing of the canny James's arrival, Henry, on 27th September, left York and was in Hull by the beginning of October, and there drew plans to fortify the place. He then returned through Lincolnshire with a Queen who was growing frantic because she could never see her lover. At Grimsthorpe, feeling a certain security in the presence of charming Kate Willoughby with the tight smile, who seemed so happy with hulking Brandon—old Suffolk who looked so like his dear friend the King, and was so jovial—here the Queen sent messages pleading with Lady Jane to do something, to do something quickly; but all to no purpose.

On went the progress, away from Grimsthorpe and charming Kate, on through Northamptonshire, until now it was back at Hampton Court; and it seemed that the lovers would never meet again. But at Hampton Court they stayed only for a day, and the King—with Kate—set out for Windsor, spending the 25th at Cheynies and arriving at Windsor on the 26th. But Hampton Court drew Henry; it was growing cold, and Windsor in the winter was a box of draughts, a maze for the wind to gallop in; so, on 30th October, they were back at Hampton Court, settled down to recover from the long trip to York and back.

A Court cannot return to its usual swing in a day, and there was much scurry amongst both gentlemen and menials taking up old tasks, falling into routine, resettling old rooms. Dereham, for the time being, was lodged with Culpeper, as they were considered to be such close friends, and neither was pleased by the arrangement. Their nerves were badly frayed by their companionship, for Culpeper grew more irritable every morning, blaming Dereham for all the difficulties of his affair, which he had certainly no right to do, for

Dereham had worked hard to facilitate matters ; and it was only owing to his ingenuity that they had been able to scramble together at York.

Dereham roved over the palace, examining it with great interest, being particularly excited by the great astronomical clock that Henry had recently installed where the sun could be seen blandly meandering round the earth according to the dictum of true science. He was jostled and cursed by the serving-men and chased away from the kitchens, as he was careless enough to wander there during the meal-hours.

He met everybody of lesser importance, and made friends with most of them. The management of so complicated a thing as a royal palace was a triumph of patience. The Cofferer was the real head, although the Lord High Chamberlain was officially so, for it was the Cofferer who looked after the money, which was by no means a sinecure, for the revenue didn't come in gold and silver, it came in tallies charged upon the receivers of certain revenues, which the King often granted to his favourites. Instead of taxing the revenue itself, the King taxed the collectors of revenues, which saved him from the bother of collecting, and he had first charge upon any receipts after the receiver had deducted his expenses. Simple as this sounds, the affair was indeed troublous, because often the collector had little or no revenues to collect, and very often and quite naturally he didn't want to part with what he had collected ; hopeless cases were returned to the Receipt of Exchequer (from where they had come) to be exchanged, which took months, and as there was a constant outgoing for food, wood, clothing, wax, etc., the Cofferer was often forced to borrow personally from the King's private money-box, presided over by the Treasurer of the Chamber, a man with a long memory. The numerous account books were made up every week at a meeting of the more important officers of the

household at what was called the Greencloth, because of the green table they sat at, just as the Exchequer earned its name because of its checked table.

Dereham poked about, learning all these details, and really enjoying himself like a dog at a dung-heap; and Culpeper sulked in his chamber; the Queen sat with her women, scheming and dreaming; the King quarrelled with his councillors and rode a-hunting.

At Cheynies, Dereham had sent for Alice Wilks—Mrs. Restwold, as she now was—who, according to Isabel, had been talking too much, and he and Tylney bribed her to keep her gob shut with clothes and jewels, and, in desperation, appointed her chamberer to the Queen: another spy. What did another spy matter? Dereham shrugged the worry aside. It might mean that they'd be caught a day earlier, but what was a day, here or there!

A day might mean little to him, but it meant much to Culpeper, who was twisted with desire. He longed to embrace Kate in the open, in the sunlight. After leaving Pomfret, there had only been those few huddled hours at York, during which she swore to him that the King had been very fatherly to her that dreaded night at Pomfret; he did not believe her, yet the lie consoled him.

He was so tired of darkness and backstairs; and here, at Hampton Court, it seemed impossible for them to meet. The Queen's lodgings were to the east, overlooking the park, and they joined Henry's apartments at the southern corner. The only way to enter her room clandestinely would have been from the north, through the Chapel Court, up the stairs and along Prince Edward's Nursery, which was now empty (the Prince of Wales, a fat, unhealthy child, being at the moment sick of a quartan fever, an unusual malady for so young a baby, at Greenwich under the gentle hands

of white-haired Dr. Butts with the merry brown eyes and jutting mouth), through the Nursery, and thus into the Queen's Gallery. It was by no means easy. Empty though the Prince's Nursery might be at the moment, the watch patrolled it thoroughly, and soldiers were almost always stationed near the chapel.

Culpeper and Dereham discussed the suggestion (made by Kate) of a silk ladder let down from the Queen's Gallery into the park, but such an idea was dangerous and depended on the chance that nobody would be watching.

"When winter comes on us," said Dereham, "it'll be a simpler matter. It's not long off, and few people but lovers or drunkards venture into the park in winter. We might manage the ladder then."

The Queen, too, was desperate. She sent Tylney to Lady Jane with the pathetic question: "When can I have the thing you promised me?" and Lady Jane answered, through Tylney, that she had sat up for it and would next day bring her word herself; which, being interpreted by Kate, meant that last night Lady Jane had waited for Culpeper, but that he had been unable to reach her through some accident.

This was true, for Lady Jane had got chilled to the bone sitting in the Prince's Nursery while Dereham and Culpeper had vainly waited hours and hours for the guard to go to sleep in the Chapel Court.

"I can't bear it any longer!" moaned Kate, wringing her little hands. It seemed to her all so unnecessary. She was lulled, and could no longer believe in danger. How could Henry hurt her? he couldn't really hurt her. . . . All she knew was that her whole body ached intolerably to be held in Master Culpeper's young arms.

Why should they be kept apart?

It wasn't fair, it wasn't fair, O God!

Dampport came one day to Court with the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, with whom Kate had lived in childhood. The Dowager Duchess was very old and very gay, with the irresponsibility of the contented aged. Kate loved her, and ran merrily to meet her in her Presence Chamber. Dereham was there at the time, and he bowed ceremoniously over the Dowager's gnarled old hand.

"Go to, you rascal!" said the Dowager Duchess, ruffling his yellow beard. "Still as big a villain as ever with the wenches, I dare swear! Thank the Lord I'm too old to be cheated by those blue eyes. Off with you now to booze with your scoundrel friend Bob Damport."

She was a charming old woman, but she was utterly tactless, as tactless as a child. While Dereham swaggered off with Damport, she turned to the woman who happened to be beside her, and said in a voice that she made no attempt to lower:

"That is he who ran off to Ireland for the Queen's sake!"

She really could not understand why everybody was suddenly so horribly uncomfortable and silent.

Master Stafford, who was lounging gracefully beside the Lady Margaret Howard, the Queen's merry sister-in-law, raised his painted eyebrows, tittered, and murmured in his greased beard, "If that's truth, and I were Dereham, I would not tell to die of it."

"Really?" smiled Lady Margaret, who had been foiling Master Stafford's amorous art with great skill during the last month. "I didn't think you were so brave a gentleman!"

"It's no bravery," confessed Stafford, shrugging. "Such a thing'd stick upon my stomach like hot pudding. I'd want to spew it out but dare not."

"A fine lover you'd make!"

"Better than any other you'll ever get. I am per-

fectly frank, so that you can have the pleasure afterwards of knowing that you were not fooled. Look! the Queen is dragging the old wench away before she spits out too much!"

Kate, terrified of what the garrulous old woman might further say, hurried the Dowager Duchess into her bed-chamber to impress upon her the important fact that she was now a Queen. But when she had the old woman safely there, before she could even begin her lecture, Kate burst into childish tears and flung herself into the Dowager Duchess's motherly arms, as she had done so often years and years ago.

DEREHAM conducted Damport around the palace as if he owned it, and Damport showed a surly interest, waiting at every corner to be led into the wine-cellars, and being persistently disappointed.

"Who are the old fellows?" he asked, jerking his thumb at the terra-cotta heads of Roman Emperors in the Base Court; and before Dereham had time to tell him, he added in a grumbling tone, "I like your chimneys."

"What you want to see is the Clock. . . ."

"The very last thing I want to see is the Clock. I hate seeing the time. It makes me feel sleepy. Nice roof you've got here. What do the curly-wurls mean?"

"I've never examined them," said Dereham, and Damport cursed himself for having spoken when his friend stood still under the Clock Tower and gazed up at the shadowed roof, at the beautifully groined woodwork. In the quatrefoils of the central wheel-like panel he could see the Rose of the King, and with the Rose a kind of bird, its curved beak suggesting a falcon. There were letters there, too, entwined in a true lover's knot.

"A—H," read Dereham. "Who can that mean?" Then he blanched, for he remembered that a falcon

was the sign of Anne Boleyn. A H : Anne Henry : in a true lover's knot.

"Nan Bullen," he murmured.

"She was Kate's cousin, wasn't she?" said Damport with sudden interest; "the one who had her head chopped off?"

"Yes," said Dereham slowly; "the one who had her head chopped off."

Luckily, Culpeper was waiting on the King, and Dereham and Damport had the chamber to themselves to drink in.

"They give you a stinking bouge," grumbled Dereham; "all I get's one chet loaf, one gallon of ale, and a quart of wine a day. I have the ale to myself as I haven't a servant, but I usually give it away. It's as dead as ditch-water. There's a special ordinance commanding the Brewer not to put any hops or brimstone in the stuff, so you can guess what it's like. It's only fit for wenches."

Damport sat on Culpeper's bed and sucked the wine through his teeth to show how greatly he enjoyed it.

"So you don't like Court life, Frank?" he said, setting down his cup and gazing at it with a lover's eye.

"Hate it!" cried Dereham. "None of them seem to think I'm as good as they are, I who was bred as one of great Norfolk's gentlemen pensioners! Most of them despise me because Kate—God bless her little heart!—shows favour towards me. Last night old Jones—he's the Queen's Usher—he made a mighty fuss because I stayed to bite a little extra fruit after the others had all risen from their seats. It was at dinner. Jones almost spat, he sent a lad over to ask when I had been appointed one of the Queen's Council—trying to be sarcastic—you see, the Council wanted to stay and quarrel together about the spending of twopence or something. 'Go to Master Jones,' says I to the blush-

ing lad,' and tell him that I was of the Queen's Council long before he knew her and shall be when she has forgotten him.' They could have killed me when I strolled past them. You've got to creep and crawl here to get even a pennyworth of wax for your candle. The only one I crawl to is the Yeoman of the Cellar, and I sneak a pottle from him now and then. It's a wretched business."

"Don't let the wine go stale," said Damport. "Pass the bottle, lad, and to the devil with 'em all except the Yeoman of the Cellar!"

WILL SOMMERS roamed the corridors and chambers of Hampton Court. He felt that there was something wrong round the corner, that something portentous was in the air. And he felt particularly that whatever danger threatened, it was gathered about the dark bullet-head of Thomas Cranmer, with the close-cropped dark and greying hair under the black biretta. Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, always had a smile on his lips, and his stone-cold eyes these days masked some highly amusing secret that he seemed about to explode any minute; and even Sommers' pertinacity failed against that quiet man's gentle smile, his pleasant, kindly manner, so fatherly, so understanding, and so silent.

"What is the jest, your grace?" asked Sommers, meeting him one day in the sand-covered stone corridor outside the chapel.

"Surely a jester is king of all jests!" smiled Cranmer, the upper-lip edging a little over the full lower-lip as if to hold back any weaknesses of the tongue.

"I love this walk," he murmured. "I love its peace after the noise of the great palace overhead."

"Yes, the kitchen's just round the corner," said Sommers irrelevantly.

"And," agreed Cranmer, "the kitchens are just

around the corner, while here is the peace of God. Man's world around the corner, and here—peace. I often walk here and stroll out into the Chapel Garden. Look at those plaques, how sweet they are! They seem a glimpse of paradise, those darling cherubim."

"They look too plump for cherubim," grumbled Sommers, glaring at the painted terra-cotta figures each side of the Chapel door. "I suppose they were that rascal of a Cardinal's work; his supporters were angels, weren't they?"

"And rightly so," said Cranmer, "for he was a worthy man, although you always hated him." He gazed at the figures: on the left of the door were the male cherubim, on the right the female, very finely cast and brightly painted. "But you're quite wrong," he added quietly, "His Gracious Highness had them erected in honour of his Queen Anne Boleyn."

Sommers gave him a quick glance. "Of course," he murmured, "I remember now: Nan's arms have been covered with Jane Seymour's lions and leopards and roses; and her initials painted out inside the lover's knots by Jane's."

"That is so," said Cranmer. "She was a wicked woman, and so it is right that the good Queen Jane's initials should be above hers, just as now she sits above her in paradise while the whore swelters in hell. It is just. All wicked women should be served thus, and as long as there is truth in the land thus will they be served!"

As casually as he could, Sommers said, "I suppose we'll have Jane's painted out soon, and Kate's rose above them."

With a quiet smile Cranmer shook his head. "I think," he said slowly, "that Queen Jane's arms will remain—now."

Sommers said no more for the moment. He had learned enough. Cranmer knew.. How he knew,

Sommers did not bother to consider, but he had sensed an air of restrained triumph in Cranmer, and had feared that he had discovered.

He felt cold and afraid. For one mad moment, he thought of slipping a warning to Culpeper or Dereham, then realised the futility and stupidity of such an attempt. Cranmer was lined against the Howards, and although Kate had quarrelled with her uncle Norfolk, through her the Protestants could still strike at him. What trick had this Cranmer ready to fling on the table? What had he been doing with sly Mr. Secretary Wriothesley and with that hound of a Southampton while the progress had wound its way towards York? It wasn't fair that human bodies should be used and flung aside in the cruel game of politics.

He looked up, sighing, and gazed into the cold, ice-cold, eyes of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury.

"You seem distressed, Will," said Cranmer kindlily. "You are a lucky man; you are as lucky as a monk in the old days, for now that you are a widower you are apart from humanity."

"Never apart," said Sommers bitterly, "not while I have eyes and ears."

"Yet you are lucky not to be mixed in the great struggle that must always be about an earthly throne. I would give all I possess except my hopes of heaven to creep away from the great load that God has set upon my back and to toil contented in some little village. I cannot rest. I must be always working, always prepared, like a man in a mêlée. If only I could escape. I surrendered my wife, all my earthly happiness, at God's command, and never since have I once found rest. Will Sommers, Will Sommers, how I envy you!"

"Why do you tell me this?" groaned Sommers.

"Because I trust you, Will. There is that about you that all men trust. You are of no party, yet you are with us all in our love for his grace. But I can't tell you all that's in my breast, I can't tell any man that."

"I don't want to hear. . . ."

Cranmer gazed up at those beautiful terra-cotta angels, at the symbols of Queen Jane—good Queen Jane who had died soon after giving birth to Prince Edward—now covering the symbols of Anne Boleyn. And he sighed deeply. For Cranmer loved all mankind, and pitied it, but he could not remain contented and loving lest he himself be destroyed.

"I can't do it," he muttered, "I can't. . . ."

"Then don't!" cried Sommers eagerly. "Let everything alone. God knows there is little enough happiness in the world with Satan edging in on all sides. It's not of them I think, but of him. It'll kill him. He's so happy now. I've never seen him so happy. Why should man make it worse for man? Don't, I beseech you! Leave things alone!"

"I would to God I could! And if I were a man alone," cried Cranmer, a blue flame flickering in those light eyes of his, the flame of a great inspiration, "and if I were a man alone, I would! But I carry a mission forward. Mine is a task for future men and women. I will build the true Church here so that no Pope or devil or man will smash it down again! I swear it. I am ready to die, to let others die. It is the cause of God!"

Sommers gazed sorrowfully at him. "There's something frightening in real sincerity," he murmured. "You are a great man, Tom Cranmer."

"A poor man," said Cranmer with his whimsical smile. "I only know that God has chosen me and that I do His task as well as my weakness permits me."

Sommers stayed silent. He was a sinful man, but he could admire and reverence true godliness in others;

and both with Catholic and Protestant, he had seen a heroism and a beautiful faith that frightened him and made him very envious. He did not know nor care which faith was right, he only knew that there was a God, and that both Catholic and Protestant worshipped Him sincerely and often very courageously.

"Even God," he muttered, "must pity lovers."

"God pities us all. Of that I am sure, if of nothing else," said Cranmer. "But what is death, my Will, if faith is in your heart? I don't think too sadly of men dying, of women dying, because they enter a sweeter land than this. And yet, O God, I wish another than I had been appointed! I tried to tell him yesterday, but my weakness conquered me, and I left him and went and wept by myself. Why have they put this on me? I can't understand myself, Will; I can be as hard and as cruel as any man when in pursuit, but when I have caught the quarry and see it panting, bleeding at my feet, my heart fails me."

"Be strong in weakness, Cranmer; leave even bad alone."

"To-day I meant to tell him. Both received the sacrament from my hands, and while they knelt before the altar, I wept to hear him cry aloud, 'I render thanks to Thee, O Lord, that after so many strange accidents that have befallen my marriages Thou hast been pleased to give me a wife so entirely conformed to my inclinations as her I now have.' The words are graven on my heart as if with hot fire."

"He said that?" muttered Sommers.

Cranmer bowed. "Ah, God," he cried, "and as if that weren't enough, later he spoke to Longland, his confessor, to arrange a public form of thanksgiving to Almighty God for having blessed him with so loving, so dutiful, and so virtuous a wife. It's to be read to-morrow, on All Saints' Day. Why is my task made heavier every second?"

"He said that?" muttered Sommers again.

"Ay," said Cranmer sadly, then he turned curiously to his companion. "How did you know of it, Will?" he asked. "I thought that none but Wriothesley, Hertford, and the Lord Chancellor had heard of it, beside myself."

"I didn't know, I only feared it," said Sommers. "He said that to you in church? Ah, Jesus!" He raised his hands to his face and groaned.

"I am past tears," said Cranmer; "there is too much to cry for nowadays."

"And you are going to say it all to-morrow? to destroy three lives—no, four lives!—with a word?" cried Sommers behind his hands. "Sometimes I hate you, Cranmer." He stopped speaking as the sobs choked him for a moment. "It's too cruel, it's too cruel!" he cried.

"It's for the sake of God. . . ."

"For your own dirty sakes, not for God." Sommers glared up at him suddenly. "You're made of ice, Cranmer, ice!" he cried. "One day I hope they burn you. See then how your blood runs."

"They can do what they like with my body. I'd die gladly if I knew that my work was finished." Cranmer laid a gentle hand on the jester's narrow shoulder. "Norfolk must be broken," he said. "He has exulted ever since the death of that martyr, Cromwell, he has spoken in all men's faces that he would not read the Holy Book and that the Pope is above all princes; while he stands powerful, we are fighting a brick wall. He must fall for God to win, and God chooses all instruments."

"Do you find God's purpose even in the death of harmless lovers!" jeered Sommers. "You'd find a purpose in the crushing of an ant, you godly men!"

"Yes," said Cranmer quietly, "even in the crushing of an ant there is some hidden purpose."

"But these are human creatures, living, breathing, perhaps laughing at this moment!"

"All the greater the purpose," said Cranmer firmly.

The purpose, the great purpose, God's purpose in building this world, in letting man trip into the gins of Satan, what was it? What purpose in these lovers being made to die? what purpose in the crushing of an ant? in the killing of a King's happiness?

Sommers searched those stone-grey-blue eyes of Thomas Cranmer, but they mirrored naught but his own frightened face: he could find no answer there, no answer anywhere.

Was he the only man in the world who did not know that answer?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

All Souls' Day, 1541

ALTHOUGH THE MONTH was the bitter one of November, the sun came out this morning of All Souls', and shone upon the red-and-purple walls of Hampton Court, upon the quaint chimneys, all of different shapes, all beautiful, with the brightly painted vanes moving languidly in a soft wind ; it made the little demons clambering on their bellies over the gables of the Great Hall come alive ; the lions, the leopards, the dragons on the little turrets, as they gripped the gilded vanes, seemed to be panting and flushed ; it brought the warm colouring out of the bricks, turning them to rich shades like the leaves on the trees in the park, like the leaves that now rustled under the hand of autumn and shone as if they bled. The sun came up, and the river glittered like a snake, scaly with light ; and in the parks, the few birds sang merrily, refreshed—starlings piping in all keys, chattering, screaming, whistling ; titmice and chaffinches swelling their tiny breasts, stamping their tiny claws on gnarled old boughs.

The last flush of summer was on the earth, and in the King's Privy Garden the King walked with his Queen.

Few were the flowers left now in the geometrical knot gardens, but the air smelt clean and delicious after the rooms with their sickly rushes and musty tapestries.

The courtiers did not follow the royal pair, for they wished to be alone, the King had said ; and with her leaning on his arm, he stepped down into the stone-

flagged sunken garden—old Wolsey's lovely Pond Garden.

Culpeper's chamber overlooked this garden, and at this moment he and Dereham and Damport watched through the leaded window-glass, silently, noting every gesture of that little woman's figure leaning on the giant's free arm, for with the other arm he carried his tall, jewelled staff.

Henry looked well to-day, dressed in his best. He looked quite young again. And he had been a beautiful man. Like his sister Margaret, Queen Dowager of Scotland, who had died but a few months ago, Henry took after his mother, Elizabeth of York; he had her squarish face. His dead brother Arthur—Katharine of Aragon's husband, who had died a short time after the marriage—had looked like his father, Henry VII, had had the same lean face, the great depth being from the eye to chin; Henry's favourite sister, Brandon's wife, the late lovely Mary, had had somewhat the same features, only beautified almost beyond recognition; but her face had well-nigh a lizard's length, a petulant mouth, high forehead, long, narrow nose, high, thin, curved brows, and quizzical eyelids that seemed to be always summing somebody up, and being rather amused by that somebody—a jolly girl, always romping and laughing. . . . Henry was the last of the Tudors, they were all dead now—Arthur, Mary, and Margaret. He had only his fat, sickly son, Edward, to carry on the line, but when he looked down at Katharine's trim figure laced up tightly in a purple dress, that rippled from under the girdle to reveal the violet undershirt, he felt that the line was not yet extinct, by God! she was the old man's elixir. . . .

"I have a confession to make," he said suddenly, sighing as he lowered himself upon a stone seat. "Sit with me, Kate. I have been watching you for a long time, testing you. . . ."

She was glad that she was preparing to sit beside him while he spoke, for the lifting of her skirts from behind, and the half turning away of her face, saved her from revealing the sudden flush of guilt that darted up her throat into her cheeks.

"Testing me, your grace?" she murmured.

"Ay," said Henry with a faint laugh, "testing you, my little wolf. You have said nothing, but surely you must have wondered at our quiet marrying and the little show that I have put upon you?"

"I thought . . . Oh, I didn't care! I was with you, with my Harry!"

"Yet you thought, and it was natural that you should wonder. I was empty of money at the time, what with the foolish pretence of marrying my sister Anne and the subsequent separation. But I'd have screwed up money enough if I'd thought fit. But I had been cheated so often, I couldn't bear to have my hopes flung to the world only to be trampled on. Forgive me, Kate, but I wasn't sure of you—then."

She could not speak. She felt that she would burst into tears if she tried to speak, but she patted his great red fist with her little white hand, tenderly, as a child might be, and with the same shy, wistful trust as a child.

Henry did not look at her. The confession stuck in his throat, but he was determined to be shrived of it and earn her forgiveness before he gave himself the luxury of looking at her.

"A girl doesn't know how a man thinks of her, with what fear and reverence he falls at her feet," said the King slowly. "She doesn't understand how easily scared he is, how one blow from her innocent, trusting eyes can bring him tumbling like a knight from his horse. I feared you, Kate, because I didn't know you, I couldn't tell what mystery was behind those eyes of yours. Your very innocence was a mask that defeated me at every turn. It's difficult to put into words, but

you frightened me. And I'd been so often cheated, I had hoped so often and so often been made a mock of by women. I dared not take you, Kate, but I longed so for you. 'It seemed at last that I had found the wife I lusted for, and that we two together could make three. So I married you."

He was silent then, poking with the end of his stick at the cracks between the bleached stones, while Kate held her breath, fearful of what was to come ; and in his chamber Culpeper tapped his fingers on the glass and picked at the lead ventilation-pane, wondering what they talked so seriously about.

" I know that men, and women too, behind my back call me lustful, but I take God to witness that I am not so," said Henry sadly. " I have been really pure in my life. I have taken very few women save under the holy bonds of matrimony. And it is truth that my conscience tortured me about Katharine from Spain, my first wife. Whenever I turned to her I saw my dead brother in her arms. I saw it with my own eyes. Yet the devil tempted me to deal fleshly with Anne Boleyn. But without Anne, I would still not have lived with Katharine. Poor Anne ! but she was a devil, in sooth, a creature of torment who was never still. I do so want peace, peace above anything, but she did nothing but jangle and chatter at me from morn till nightfall. And she sinned. Then Jane Seymour came to me and I was happy. But God did not want me to be happy just then, so he took Jane from me and gave me Anne of Cleves. Upon my faith, sweetheart, I had no carnal dole with Anne. She is my sister. And if I had been a wicked man, thinking only of fleshly delight, surely I would have taken her when her body chafed on mine ? But as I said to Cromwell : when I touched her slack breasts and belly, it so struck me to the heart that I had no courage to prove further. She has left me with what-

ever maidenhood she came to me with. I did not want a woman whom I didn't love. And so I came to you, to my rose without a thorn, my rosebud of love,

He had so great affection
To have it in possession,
Only for beauty of a rose
Of which the leaves were full close
In the manner of a round button,
That heart and whole affection
He gave thereto in sotherness
For the excellent sweetness
The which environ did spread
Full desirous it to poss-ed . . .

as old Lydgate puts it; but, I swear, half of that you don't understand, it was writ so long ago. I am running on, for poetry makes me run on without end, I love it so. I am a great lover of poetry, being a lover of womanhood. And while I talk, I keep my subjects from Mass, which is not right nor kingly."

"You were saying," said Kate tremulously, as he paused, "that you were but testing my maidenhood . . .

"Ah, yes, yes." He roused himself and blinked his small golden eyes. "Yes, my love. It was nothing. I was foolish. I was a stupid man."

"You want me to forgive you!"

"Yes, my dear, yes." For the first time that morning he gazed full at her, and she saw him as he was, without his kingly aura, so pathetic behind the blustering kingship, a pathetic old man he was, reading poetry and dreaming, and suffering because he dreamed.

She touched his forehead tenderly, and said, "Forgive you, my lord? I have everything to thank you for and nothing to forgive, nothing whatever."

"I should have known," he muttered, "I should never have doubted you. But with the next year, sweetheart, we'll begin our new life together. I've

asked the Bishop of Lincoln to announce to all the world to-day how much I glory in you, and how greatly happy you have made me."

"I don't deserve it!" she cried. "I owe everything to you, everything!"

He was so kind, so good! For one lunatic moment she even considered telling him about Culpeper; she wanted to cry in his arms, to tell him all the wickednesses of her life, things she had not even told her confessor, and abase herself before him, like the Magdalen before Christ; it was only the realisation that thereby she would lose Culpeper that held her back, for she could not bear the thought of losing Culpeper. He was the only thing on earth that mattered to her now, he was part of her body, part of her soul.

"You are crying, my heart!" said the King wonderingly.

"You, too!" she said, with a half-sob, half-laugh.

"What a pair of ninnies we are!" he cried jovially. "We are going to be so happy together, aren't we, love?"

"So very happy," she said, and she meant it. She would sacrifice everything but her lover to make him happy; she did not care about herself, she would degrade herself, would do anything, if only she could make this poor, fatherly old man contented with life.

Culpeper was almost late for Mass that morning, for he did not leave his chamber until the King had gone from his garden with his courtiers, as he had hoped that Kate might be left there alone; but so stupid a hope was, of course, doomed, and he had to run to the chapel, and arrived there panting and nervous.

The sun had gone for the moment, and it was quite dark in the chapel save for the candles on the altar, their steady flame showing on the jewels of the golden pyx suspended above. The great arched roof was

hidden with its heavy pendants that were like bunches of wooden flowers painted gaudily; the angels emblazoned, showing the escutcheons of Henry's and Jane Seymour's arms and mottoes; the boys playing musical instruments in the gayest clothes: the colours showed dimly through the gloom above him as Culpeper took his place amongst the gentlemen.

Henry was already there, in the royal pew, on his knees to thank God for the wife He had given him, and near by Will Sommers cocked his head under his hands and watched the square figure of Thomas Cranmer in his black vestments as he edged towards the King.

Cranmer had lost his courage again. He found that he could not tell the King by mouth. Always, that was the way with him. He was a most brave man because he was a coward; it needed nights of tears and constant praying to gather his will into strength enough to act; and he was surrounded by enemies, by lovers of the old days before Cromwell had smashed the Pope's power in England, men who were ready any minute to buckle on their armour for the Faith; all these enemies, the powerful Howards at their head, were gathered around the stocky figure of the Archbishop of Canterbury, ready any minute to drag him down, with his Church of England on top of him.

They thought that they had had him when Cromwell fell.

That day, 10th June 1540, the Privy Council had met at Westminster to attend Parliament. As Cromwell passed the palace, the wind had lifted the cap from his head and flung it to the earth. Cromwell glared round and saw that no man doffed his cap before his naked head. "A high wind, indeed," he scoffed, "to blow my bonnet off and to keep yours on!" They had sneered at him but had said nothing, but later there had been noise enough, when at dinner

great Norfolk leaped to his feet, shouting, "Cromwell, do not sit there! Traitors do not sit with gentlemen!" And exultantly they had all cried, "Traitor! traitor!" But Cranmer did not fall.

He had been tutor to Anne Boleyn, and when Anne Boleyn's hot young blood gouted on to the green grass, Cranmer had not fallen. Even now they were plotting to impeach him: he knew it. Both sides used underhand tricks and cowardly blows, both Catholic and Protestant; there was no other way for them to fight, and if both were treacherous, both were equally ready to redeem their treachery by dying openly and horribly if there was no other way of winning.

Warily, fearfully, Cranmer walked the straight path he had marked out for himself; he was a brave man because he knew what dangers he faced, and all the time his heart was cold with terror. And he hated to do ill, it broke his heart to bring pain on others; but if the Church of England must stand, and he swore that it would stand, he must be swift and cruel.

Yet he could not bear to speak those words that would shatter Henry's paradise. He wrote them on a slip of paper, folded it carefully and kept it in the palm of his hand.

As, during the magnificent service to the souls of those in purgatory, before the Blessed Sacrament was administered, Cranmer moved slowly towards the royal pew, he felt the glance of Will Sommers fixed beseechingly upon him, but he dared not look round.

Will Sommers groaned, for the paper was in Henry's hand.

Startled at being interrupted in his devotions, Henry glared up, seized the paper and pushed it testily into his sleeve.

THE mine was laid.

As they came from the chapel, the King was flushed

and very happy, ready for breakfast. Later, at the All Souls' service—for this had been very little more than the usual Mass, the great ceremony being left for later—Longland was to announce his wedded happiness, and the King rather looked forward to that moment.

Will Sommers walked close beside him, hoping for a chance to pluck that slip of paper out of his full slashed sleeve, but he could not get close enough.

Along the Gallery went the King, his courtiers flocking behind him. They all felt very hungry, for Mass had been late, owing to the King's talk with his Queen in the garden; now it was already past eight o'clock, and their stomachs hammered inside them, lusty for food.

Up to the Great Watching Chamber they went, where the mighty oriel window glared with the King's and Wolsey's arms and colours, where the tapestries of the Triumphs were hooked from the roof—Fate's Triumph, with Lucrece and with Cupid bound, amongst them; through the Watching Chamber, and into Henry's Presence Chamber they went, waiting to be dismissed, and there the King flung himself, sighing happily, into the gilded Chair of State with the coloured awning above him.

Sommers drew close, hoping to distract him from recalling that note in his sleeve, but he was too late.

The King had slipped the note from its place and was reading it.

Not one of the courtiers there would ever forget that moment.

The King scanned the note carelessly, then his hand grew rigid, the golden eyes grew hard; those who were near enough, heard him breathe suddenly heavily. He glared up at them, then darted down again to read; he turned the letter over, frowning; then read again; and as he read the third time, the colour left his cheeks, the eyelids drooped; from being a robust merry man, he looked suddenly old and ill.

Culpeper was near by, talking to Charles Howard, and Howard whispered, "What can the news be that makes him look so terrible? Bad news from Ireland, think ye?"

"Or from Scotland?" said a nearby man. "I hear that there've been raids at Berwick since we left."

"No, none of those," said the third man, "for I saw Canterbury slip the message to his grace during Mass. It's some household or divine affair. Mayhap some of the Greencloth or the Exchequer have been sliding gold into their own pouches."

"Or that plump Anne is to come back," said Stafford. "I hear that she's proved an incestuous sister and grows plumper outwards every day."

Culpeper felt as if he would collapse. His legs had lost all strength, and his brain seemed to have dissolved and to whirl like water in his skull. He could not see clearly and, shuddering, he shut his eyes.

He opened them again, and still the King sat in his gilded Chair of State under the golden canopy: at his back, the Arms of England rippled at every move he made. He still read the note that Cranmer had given him, read it unbelieving, frightened.

It couldn't possibly be true. No, no, it wasn't true.

Suddenly he glared up and saw all his courtiers watching him curiously.

"Send them away," he said weakly, turning to Sommers; "send them all away."

They edged out slowly, backwards, all their eyes fixed on him, on that King seated under the golden canopy, on the gilded Chair of State, with the Arms of England behind him upheld by dragon and greyhound on a green-and-white back; despite his great size, he looked small in that vast room, its walls hung with green-and-white hangings embroidered with the gold Tudor Rose and the fleur-de-lis of France; no King, but a pathetic human being, he looked, with that scrap of paper in

his hands, paper scrawled with ink ; then he was alone with his jester, Will Sommers.

Culpeper could not keep still. He walked the Great Watching Chamber with the other courtiers ; he gazed through the coloured glass at the round kitchen like a monstrous beehive in the court outside ; he played with the tapestries, shaking them on their hooks. He found himself standing before the Triumph of Fate. The three oxen ploughed forward, bells on the traces, bells dribbling from their bellies, men and women falling under their insensate hoofs ; and triumphantly aloft, the Three Sisters sat imperturbable, while Chastity bled to death at Atropos's spear-point : Atropos sat above her sisters, Atropos the inflexible, her right hand toyed with a skull, her left hand clutched the scissors that clipped the narrow threads of man's poor life, that was wound by Lachesis, the mother of futurity, from the distaff that her sister Cloto spun—Cloto who, with Lilith and Nehemah, haunts the dark chambers where the woman moans in travail, bringing us from the dark world of before-life into the ice-cold air.

Lucrece had not taken the knife after all. He was not Tarquin, no soft-soled ravisher. He was a lover, chosen and adored.

Culpeper turned abruptly away. Why was it that when men spoke of Fate, they spoke always of something cruel, something that was never kind?

What was the King reading? He dared not think of that lest he go mad. What was the King saying now to Sommers? Sommers never had liked him, he felt sure of that, he had always jeered at him. It couldn't be about him and Kate. Yet why the secrecy? why were they hunted out? why did the King look suddenly so old?

Sommers opened the door and beckoned a page, spoke a few words to him and the lad ran swiftly off.

He did not stop and tell Culpeper that he was wanted, and Culpeper breathed again. No, it couldn't be that. It couldn't possibly be that.

The page returned ; Cranmer was with him, looking very white in his black vestments, very determined. Cranmer was soon followed by Sir Anthony Browne and Mr. Secretary Wriothesley ; they in their turn were followed by the Lord Privy Seal, Sir William Fitzwilliam, Earl of Southampton, who was actually smiling in a dry fashion, his heavy, shaven chin was pressed down and the jowls swelled out over the high white collar ; after Southampton, came Sir John Russel, the Lord Admiral.

The doors shut behind them and the grooms stood on guard with folded arms, chins up.

What was the secret ? what had Cranmer written ?

The suspense grew unbearable, and at last Culpeper darted off to see Dereham and to tell him what had happened.

He found Dereham just returned from breakfast, drinking a cup of ale by the window.

"My God," cried Culpeper, "terrible things are happening ! I fear the King suspects, if already he does not know all !"

Dereham gave no sign of fear. He set the cup down on the table, and his hand was steady.

"You need this more than I," he said ; "drink it, man, and pull yourself together. If that's truth, you'll need your wits well about you if she's to be saved."

Culpeper seized the cup and drained it empty.

"I don't know what's happened," he cried, "but at Mass this morning the Archbishop of Canterbury slipped a note into the King's hand. He didn't read it until we were in his Presence Chamber, waiting to be dismissed for breakfast. When he read it, he blanched as if he saw death, and he looked blind with suffering

when he gazed up at us. His eyes were glazed and his hands shook. Something has struck him badly. God knows what's happened. I fear it must be about her, for nothing else could affect him so frightfully. He sent us all out of the Presence Chamber and stayed there alone with Sommers. Later, he called his chief councillors."

"Perhaps, after all, it is some State affair? . . ."

"State affair! what State affair could come from Canterbury that should be so mightily important! And why did the jester stay? I don't trust Sommers. He doesn't like me, and while he has the kindest heart in the world, if he dislikes a man, he's a dangerous enemy. He was terrible to the Cardinal."

"You must try to find out everything, Culpeper. If we're warned, we can do much. My ship's still on the Irish coast and, you never know, we might get away there."

"Let's go now!" cried Culpeper, starting up with fresh hope. "Let's go while there's time!"

"Not now. We'll have to plot carefully. Once Kate's missed, the whole country'll be up, armed and after us."

"I hadn't thought of that. . . ."

"We'll do it, though," said Dereham. "But look here, master, no matter what trouble brews, you must keep her from hearing till the last moment. No need that she should lose her sleep until she has to."

"I won't tell her. But this ship? When will we go?"

"Leave it to me. I must think and talk with Damport; you run off now and glean what you can about the King."

"But be quick!" pleaded Culpeper. "I can't stand this suspense much longer!"

"I'll be as quick as I can, you may be sure," said Dereham coldly. "Now be off with you."

The same gallants strode the King's Great Watching Chamber under the low roof with its painted and gilt ribs and its pendants of oak, its wreaths encircling the Tudor Rose, crowned hawthorn trees, and the phœnix in its bed of fire surrounded by red-and-white roses above a round squat castle—the emblem of Jane Seymour ; under this gay roof wandered the gallants, curiosity keeping them even from breakfast, they fingered the tapestries, and gazed dully through the semicircular-coloured oriel window into the Round Kitchen Court.

Culpeper walked with them, and heard their whispered commentaries, for none there spoke above a whisper. He came face to face with Tom Paston, who gazed curiously at him, with the fearful compassion with which one might look upon a doomed man : then he turned and was gone in the crowd. So Paston suspected ! Had he talked ? Culpeper dismissed the idea instantly. Even though they were no longer friends, he knew that Paston was too true a man to talk.

At last there was a stir in the mob ; they shifted and widened out against the walls ; all talking stopped. The grooms were on one knee ; each man present fell on one knee as the doors were flung open and the King came out before his councillors.

The King was smiling !

They could not comprehend that smile ; they did not know that it was forced by a powerful will upon that little kingly mouth ; they did not know the torture of doubt in his heart when he hobbled into the Watching Chamber, breathing heavily as he leaned on his jewelled staff.

" Marry ! " he cried. " I have a great gathering this morning ! I pray that none of you gentlemen missed breakfast through your zeal. And it is already near time for service. To-day is All Souls', gentlemen, when we pray for the souls of the dead."

Culpeper on his knee remained silent, terrified, as he heard that stick come closer, knocking on the floor blindly with the tread of Fate's oxen, with the same regularity; closer it came, closer the heavy breathing, the dragging of the hurt, weary leg; and it passed him by.

He almost swooned as it passed him by; and he heard the King mutter under his breath softly, "When we pray for the souls of the dead, the souls of the dead. . . ."

THERE was no proclamation at the service, no public offering of thanks to God for blessing His Majesty King Henry VIII, King of England and France and Lord of Ireland, with a wife so loving, so dutiful, and so virtuous as Katharine, Queen of England, for whom that mighty double-bed had been made amidst spluttering of torches, under the eyes of Master Harmon, not so very many months ago.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Suspense

MANY WERE THE RUMOURS in Hampton Court that day. All that was known was that the Privy Seal and Mr. Secretary had called for their horses and had ridden off. The King showed no signs, but he pleaded illness and would not see his Queen. It was whispered that the Queen was with child : nobody knew where the whisper came from, nobody knew if it was true. It reached Culpeper, and for one wild moment he thought that it might be his, then realised the hopelessness of its future whether it was his or not. He felt hemmed in as if slowly suffocating, for now he no longer doubted that his doom was sealed by the King's great seal. Every step he heard outside his door he thought was the guard arriving, and braced himself to meet the stern eyes of a sergeant-at-arms, but always the steps passed his chamber.

He went to bed that night, but he did not sleep. Dereham lay beside him, and Dereham also did not sleep, but he pretended to snore lustily and kept his eyes shut. Once in the darkness he heard Culpeper sobbing, and could scarcely hold in his anger, for he had all the strong man's jealous hatred of the weak, and could not bear to see a man act the coward. He did not understand that the courage Culpeper possessed was really greater than his, because it was a courage built on the quicksands of fear.

On one point Dereham suffered himself to be cowardly : he could not bear to think of the morrow ; if only that day was passed, everything would be all right. He had sent Damport off to a friendly ship-

owner at Deptford, and he would be back some time to-morrow with news. To-morrow night they would make off. They could dress Kate up in Culpeper's clothes, then ride like demons to Deptford, or wherever the ship was anchored. He wondered if it would be possible to leave Culpeper behind, then sighed to think that Kate would not suffer him to do that. What in God's name could a woman see in that baby-hearted lad!

It was a thousand chances to one, but that one chance was worth the risking. He hated the land. At sea, one could fight and could die fighting; but when hemmed in with illimitable earth, they could beset you on all sides, could corner you, inescapably. He ached for the smell of salt, for the lash of wind on his cheeks, for the feel of the whipstaff creaking in his hand. She was called the *Kate*, this pirate ship of his, a strongly built vessel in the new mode, with her planks laid edge to edge, carvel-fashion, instead of in the old clincher-built way that soon let the water in. He had cut down most of her lofty poop and made her decks as flush as he could, for he found her to be swifter when like that, and swiftness meant everything to a pirate. For flag, he broke a blue cloth embroidered with a red friar's knot—Friar's Knot for Francis!—and within the knot, a pansy. A gallant ship, the *Kate*. Ah, to be aboard her now! to hear the man aloft in the basket-top yelling as they passed the shoals! to feel the whipstaff lunging as the current caught it, struggling to tear itself from the tackling! Ah, dear God, to have Kate with him there, to see her long red hair caught by the wind, flung up by the wind, bunching and flowing behind her, to see the salt-water as it crashed over the bowsprit falling like dew on her cheeks! to hear the water lapping, planks creaking, the tackle whining, plucked by the musician wind, the men singing on the bowlines, shouting when they tore the skin from their hands! In the open sea, with all the seas before

them ! . . . They could sail to the Mediterranean and live in the East under the Grand Turk's crescent. Henry would not dare to follow there !

It would happen. He would make it happen. Tomorrow night they would ride off like the wind, would smuggle themselves aboard an outward-bound ship, sneak somehow to the coast of Ireland where his beloved *Kate* awaited him . . . then yo, ho, for the Grand Turk !

It would be easy. Nothing was as dangerous as you thought it would be. If only this suspense was over ! He was a man of action and could not tolerate suspense. Time enraged him. He wanted to do at once the thing that he desired, and always time came between the desire and the consummation. There was tomorrow to pass, waiting for Bob Damport, and fearing all the while that the soldiers would come first and take him. He felt that if he was once aboard his ship, he would win through even if Henry sent his whole damned navy after him, every English ship that he had, packed with men in green-and-white. He would beat them off, or he would die fighting. Death had no horrors if it came upon you when you were exalted with battle. But he must wait and wait, wait for Damport, and if Damport had found a friendly captain, then to see Kate and to smuggle her out, probably through the Nursery, perhaps lower her from her gallery into the park. He would strangle the guard, if necessary. Then the ride to where the ship waited for them. They would not take to the roads but would cut across fields and along unfrequented paths. Hadn't Cranmer smuggled his wife out of (or was it, into ?) England in a barrel ? They could all four hide in barrels until safe at sea.

It must not fail.

DEREHAM might not sleep, Culpeper might not sleep,

even the King might stay sighing and lonely and wakeful, in his great double-bed, but the Queen in her double-bed lay snuggled against the satin bolster, her limbs tucked up, a smile on her heavy mouth, a gentle flush in her cheeks. . . . She felt no danger in the air, she slept as peacefully as a child.

And in his little room, Will Sommers knelt, striving to meet his God, striving to attain that Faith that others could attain but which was denied to him : the Faith that Cranmer held, that Gardiner held, that Wolsey had held ; he could not fully understand how men so different as Cranmer and Gardiner could both fall on their knees before the same God yet worship Him differently, each assured that his faith was the only faith. Which was right? or were both right? Surely God loved more the hearts of men than their outward show?

Cranmer, too, was praying at that moment, and weeping as he prayed. He wanted a sign from God that what he did was right. Doubts assailed him. He did not doubt God or his faith, but he doubted himself and if he were doing the right thing in telling Henry what John Lascelles had told him. Lascelles was a liar, a Lutheran, but would he dare to lie about so huge a thing as this? To-morrow all would be known. Southampton to-day had ridden to Sussex to interview Lascelles' sister, Mary Hall, and her husband. He was to pretend to her husband that himself was on a hunting trip ; and to her, he was to ask to make arrangements for the lodging of his hunting friends : then slyly, he was to worm all from her. Mr. Secretary Wriothesley was in London, questioning Henry Manox in his home at Lambeth about those strange things that he had said, according to Lascelles' report of what his sister Mary had told him.

The King in the morning still showed no signs of what he thought when Culpeper came with the five other

gentlemen to help to dress him. He looked long on the lad, and sighed, but there was no anger in his glance, and Culpeper felt a relief that was almost painful. Perhaps it was some trivial matter, after all? Culpeper knew his King well enough to realise that if Henry suspected him in even the faintest way, he could not have borne to have had him near. And he particularly chose Culpeper for his companion this morning, smiling wanly at the lad's sick countenance.

"She's still hard upon you, boy?" he muttered. "Surely these women are devils sent to beguile men! It is not only us simple fellows, but was not the learned Aristotle made a mock of by a villainous wench? and the poet Virgil, that great wizard, was he not hauled up in a basket outside some jade's window for all the world to mock at? We must not forget that Eve was man's traitoress, and that the serpent hissed at her through a woman's mouth. Yet surely some of them are good?"

He looked up dully at my Lord Hertford, who with a sly smile was warming Henry's crimson embroidered doublet before the fire; then he raised his arms while Culpeper pulled the black gold-worked shirt over his great shoulders, the breasts womanly with fat, the stomach rising mountainous and split with a film of golden hairs. He shook the cloth down, and Culpeper pushed it into the satin breeches that were distended with straw.

"I do not believe it," said Henry, staring at Hertford malevolently. "It is a lie, a double-damned lie!"

Over the shirt, the embroidered crimson doublet; over the doublet, a red velvet jerkin weighted with gold and small lace of intricate design, looping and curling into knots, the full sleeves buttoned at the armholes—crimson sleeves they were, the purple silk lining bulging from the slashes—over the jerkin, the long armless gown of cloth-of-gold.

Henry did not speak again as they pulled and pushed the clothes on him, but he sighed as his slippers were taken off and his feet were encased in slashed velvet, broad-toed shoes. He twisted his toes in his ugly shoes and gazed mistily at his gentlemen, and they pretended not to see that there were tears in his eyes.

UNDOUBTEDLY he suspected something—but what? Culpeper strode through the King's rooms until he was in the Great Hall; through the Great Hall, past the screens, down the wide steps and into the large Base Court he went. There he paused, breathing heavily, and kicked at the paving-stones.

Undoubtedly Henry knew something, he suspected, yet curiously enough, he did not distrust Culpeper. Perhaps only a word had been spoken? only an unknown man's name coupled with hers? If he but knew!

Waiting, waiting for the blow to fall out of the air. It must come soon now, at any moment. He no longer hated Dereham, he clung to him as to a last hope. The man seemed to have supernatural powers, nothing frightened him, he was a rock, inhuman. Culpeper remembered how when first they met he had thought him the devil; and now he began to wonder if perhaps that thought had not been correct.

He had brought disaster with him. Until he came, there had been no trouble of any kind. But his enigmatic figure had appeared, swung up from the seas, and immediately suspicions came. What was this affair to him? Why was he interfering? Why was he so eager to help? It wasn't his affair.

By God, he was an interfering rascal!

All his rage against Dereham flooded back. He began to hate the man, he loathed his cold blue eyes, his contemptuous jeering manner. And most certainly it was strange that he should of his own deliberate will

be involved in these dangers. Every one else had fled from him, but this Dereham entered the arena on his own accord, and had coolly taken command of everything . . . all for no conceivable purpose, yet seeming to help them. But that was Satan's trick—to pretend to help you and only to lead you farther into the mud until there was no hope of getting out.

Of course, who else could he be but Satan? Who the devil else was he? Who but Satan, that professional busybody, would push himself into other peoples' dangerous affairs as if they were his own?

Culpeper strode upstairs to his own chamber, and Dereham, who lay stretched on the bed, glanced up eagerly at the sound of his approach, believing him to be Damport, and he frowned when he saw who it was.

"Tell me," said Culpeper, "are you Satan?" and he crossed himself as he spoke.

"Satan?" repeated Dereham, not sure whether Culpeper was mad or jesting. "I am as good a Christian as you, by God, Master Culpeper!" he cried. "What do you mean by it? Satan indeed! I'm in no mood for jesting. I'm damned if I'll be trifled with!"

"Answer me truthfully," said Culpeper, and made the sign of the cross in the air above Dereham, "are you Satan?"

Dereham did not disappear in a burst of brimstone, he did not sprout black wings or grow horns; his hands with their film of golden hairs did not sharpen to talons, nor did his feet in the flat-toed shoes thicken into hoofs.

He remained Dereham, the same Francis Dereham. And he laughed.

"I'm no devil," he said.

"Then why are you mixed in this? why have you come amongst us?"

"You don't know?" Dereham looked suddenly very weary. He got off the bed and strolled to the window. He gazed out at the rain falling in a gentle flow on the

dying leaves of autumn and pattering on the small pool in the Cardinal's Pond Garden. "I won't tell you why," he said. "You'll understand some time, quite soon enough." Then suddenly his reserve went, and he shouted, "I can't bear this, I can't bear it! It's like a prison. If Bob doesn't come I'll tear the place to pieces with my fingers! I'll go mad! Let's do something, Culpeper? what can we do? what can we do to pass the hours? Dice? cards? tables? No, I couldn't bear to sit down and play with toys. My body twists, mad to be up and doing. What sport is there? Can you play tennis?"

"I don't want to play tennis," said Culpeper sullenly.

"Anything's better than standing still. Tennis'd make the hours go swifter. We might forget then that Bob Damport rides so slowly. It'll do you good, man, make you forget."

"Nothing can make me forget."

"Nor me. But it's better than standing still. My muscles can't stand it. Tire the body, man, and you tire the mind. We're both strained to breaking-point. We both need to be dragged out of ourselves. Come, will you play?"

"All right," grumbled Culpeper. Dereham was correct: activity would kill at least an hour. Anything was better than standing still, waiting for to-night and the great adventure.

"I'll leave a note for Damport." Dereham seized standish and paper, and scribbled the one word *Tennis* on a sheet, then impaled it to the wall with his dagger.

THEY did not take long to dress. They stripped themselves of coat, jerkin, doublet, and shirt, and put on the thin linen shirts embroidered with fine thread that were commonly used by tennis players. They kicked off their shoes and pulled on woollen slippers. Then they took their rackets, and strode down to the tennis

play that ran off at the north-east end of the palace, next to the Prince's Nursery.

Luckily the play was empty except for the keeper, Anthony Ansley, who was examining the balls to see that none of the seams had sprung. He knew Culpeper well enough, for he was a serious player, but Dereham was a stranger to him.

"Is he a player?" he asked dubiously. "I cannot have beginners in his grace's court. It is not seemly."

"I am as clever a player as any in England," said Dereham, and swung his racket in the air to show how expertly he handled it. "A minute's play'll show you how good I am," he boasted.

And so it proved. After the numerous ceremonies, the bowing to each other, the saluting with the rackets, the keeper tossed for position, and Culpeper won the hazard; but from the very first moment, when the Master flung the ball on to the wooden roof of the penthouse, Culpeper knew that he had no hope of winning. Dereham, for all his size, was as swift as a terrier; not a ball in play passed his lightning stroke; his curved racket seemed to be everywhere. Culpeper felt the leather grow greasy against his palm as he sweated, more with mortification than with the exercise. His hatred of Dereham grew stronger every second, became almost uncontrollable; and the stronger it grew, the worse was his game.

The gentle November light glimmered through the wired windows high up, and left shadows in far corners, making the floor murky, and the cord with its narrow fringe seemed to swim in a calm pool. It was the tears in his eyes as much as the bad lighting that made Culpeper miss the ball so continually. He could barely see with rage. That active man on the other side of the cord was again the devil to him. He felt sure that if he had some Holy Water to spill, Dereham would explode like a phantom.

He began to swing blindly and to hit with all his force at the ball, so that the tight diagonal gut-strings of his racket sang with faint music at every stroke. That was not only bad play, it was bad manners ; but he no longer cared. Master Ansley, who was Marker, felt that he should stop the game, and perhaps he would have been forced to if a sudden bellow of rage from the dedans—the spectators' gallery—had not stopped Culpeper in the very act of swiping at a ball he didn't see, and left him suspended in mid-action while the ball bounded past him.

"My God!"

It was the King shouting, almost purple with rage.

"My God! Tom Culpeper, Tom Culpeper! get out at once! How dare you, sir!"

Culpeper bowed humbly. "We were just hitting the ball, your grace," he muttered, "we were not playing."

"Just hitting the ball!" said Henry, amazed. "What do you mean? Just hitting the ball! And who's this man with you?"

Dereham raised himself from his knee and said quietly, "I am Francis Dereham, your grace, Her Highness's secretary."

"Dereham?" The King's mouth shut. Into his golden eyes there crept a look of suspicion mingled with hatred. "You are playing in my court! Who gave you permission?"

"Nobody, your grace," said Dereham. "I thought all gentlemen of the household were permitted to play here."

"Oh, you thought that, did you?" cried the King, grasping the wooden walls of the dedan, and panting. "You rascal! By the living God, you trespass everywhere! you upstart courtiers! I'll show who's master!"

He would have said more, but Will Sommers suddenly

leaned over behind him and whispered words of caution ; and he nodded.

"Get out!" he cried in a thin voice. "Get out! No, come here. Give me that racket. Here, quick, you rascal!"

Dereham bowed and passed him his racket. The King seized it, looked closely at it, then with fierce blow after blow smashed the brown wooden frame against the wall.

"There!" he said with an angry grin, "you won't play tricks with that again! Now, go!"

When they were walking along the narrow gallery back to the palace, Culpeper said awkwardly, "That was my fault. You were playing a splendid game. I was the one who played like a lout, but he didn't say anything to me. Why did he single you out?"

"Because," said Dereham with a stern laugh, "he went for me about something else. If Damport doesn't fix things and we don't escape to-night, there'll be no Frank Dereham to greet the sun to-morrow."

"I don't understand," said Culpeper.

"You will," said Dereham. "Very soon, I fear you will."

Damport had not arrived. They paced their room like the lions at the Tower in their cage of wickerwork ; they paced up and down, frowning, silent. No noise was there but their breathing and the padding of their shoes. Dinner-time came, but neither bothered to attend his mess. They did not feel hungry, they felt nothing but the tension of waiting, waiting. . . . The dagger was still on the wall, piercing the note to Damport. Dereham wrenched it out and flung the paper into the fire. The dagger he slipped into its sheath at his side. Just for something to do they had changed into their everyday clothes. That took up a little time; waiting, waiting

for Damport; and even when Damport came, there would be further waiting, waiting for nightfall; then the terror that their plans might miscarry, that they might get caught at the last moment. . . .

They heard a step in the passage outside, and stayed rigid, not daring to believe that it was Damport's step, and even when he entered the chamber, they could not really believe that it was he, and stood gaping at him as if he were a ghost.

"Well," said Damport, grinning; "I'm thirsty. I flogged my horse so quick I didn't have time for a drink since I left London. Where do you keep the bottles?"

Dereham leaped at him, smiling, he could almost have laughed aloud.

"What news?" he cried.

"All's ready, Frank. You sail at dawn." Damport smiled happily at him. "You're not going to let a man stay thirsty, are you?" he grumbled. "After all that trouble, too?"

"No, no, of course not. The wine, Culpeper! Tell me, Bob, where do we sail to? where does she pick us up?"

"You'll have to get to Land's End, what some call Gravesend. I had the devil's own trouble with the rascal. First, I went to Deptford, and they told me he was at the Steelyard, and I had to go like hell to London, and then I had to argue half the night with him, he's so afraid of angering the King. There's been some trouble with the League, but he came round at last. The ship's got a name I couldn't remember, something foreign, but you'll know her because she's the only one in the stream. She sails for Flanders with wool, under the lap, you know. That's why she's at Gravesend. How you're going to get to Ireland from there, I don't know."

"And I don't care! Ah, Damport, this is the grandest news! Drink, man!"

Culpeper had poured out three cupfuls of Rhenish, and now they raised them in a toast.

"To the great adventure!" cried Dereham.

Then, as he set the cup down, he said, "Yet I fear deeply. I smelt danger when he went for me in the tennis play. If only I can live through until to-night! If . . . if I don't, Bob, you know what to do? Burn every paper of mine at the Dowager's, let none fall into their hands."

"I'll do that," said Damport.

"Now I can drink easier!" Dereham raised the half-empty cup to his lips, and there was silence while all three drank; and in that silence they heard the firm steps of men approaching, they heard the clatter of steel; the steps came nearer until they stopped outside the door.

White as a candle, Dereham put the cup back on the table with a shaking hand.

"We are too late," he said.

Even as he spoke, somebody rapped on the door.

That knock seemed to strike at Culpeper's backbone, it sent a shudder through every inch of his frame.

They had come for him at last.

"My God," he said, "they can rack me till I break, I will not speak!"

"For the first time," said Dereham, "I love you, man."

As they clasped hands, again came the knocking, heavier this time.

"Open the door, Bob," said Dereham: "I'm ready."

"You?" cried Culpeper. "It's me they want, not you."

Sadly, Dereham shook his head. "Your turn comes later," he said, with a grim laugh. "I go first."

"But you? what have they got against you?"

Damport had opened the door. In the passage, Cul-

peper saw the glimmer of steel plates; then Roger Middlewood, one of the sergeants-at-arms, entered, holding his gilt halberd in one hand, its crimson velvet thongs twisted about his wrist, his face perfectly expressionless.

"Francis Dereham?" he asked.

"But why?" cried Culpeper. "Why you?"

"Francis Dereham," said Middlewood as Dereham bowed to him, "I am commanded by the Privy Council to apprehend you on a charge of piracy and to place you in confinement in the Porter's Lodge to await questioning."

"I am ready," said Dereham quietly, unbuckling his sword-belt and bowing as he passed it to Middlewood, who took it with a bow and a grim smile. Then he turned to Culpeper.

"I suppose," he said softly, "you had best know now . . . Kate is my wife."

"What, what's that?" It was like a blow in the face. It almost knocked Culpeper off his feet and sent him staggering against the wall. "She . . . she's your wife?"

"Ay," said Dereham, "she's been my wife before God and man for many years. That's why I'm wanted. Sergeant, I am ready."

"A minute!" cried Culpeper. "A minute, please!"

"Bob'll tell you if I speak truth or not." Dereham turned at the door. "I'm sorry it's ended like this," he said, "but I always warned you that it was inevitable."

"My God!" cried Culpeper. Everything had fallen around him, his whole world had fallen. He felt lonely and very afraid.

"My God!" he cried. "It can't be true!"

"It's true enough," said Damport, glumly finishing his wine; "I've known it for years and years. . . ."

PART SIX

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Before the Council

NEVER HAD CULPEPER SUFFERED such a night. Sleep was impossible, and dawn found him wide-eyed and restless. The sun did not come near his chamber, morning or afternoon, but the light stole gently over the roof-tops and glistened on the autumn leaves in the garden, and he felt the darkness lift like a weight from his body. Outside, he heard the rising chatter of birds arguing ceaselessly—chaffinch and titmouse; and a sharp-eyed sparrow stood a moment on his sill and waited for bread. He groaned and wished that he could die. All night, the memory of Dereham's words had beaten inside his skull. He would never forget them.

She, Kate, was Dereham's wife!

It could not be possible! . . . Was this what the King had discovered? As yet, then, he knew nothing of the later affair? It was going to be the usual pre-contract that had sprung up, as it had with Anne Boleyn and Percy, Anne of Cleves and the Duke of Lorraine's son?

Culpeper never for a moment believed that Dereham had married Kate in a church before a priest: that was not necessary. In a Catholic country like England, it was sufficient if two lovers plighted their troth before witnesses for them to be legally married. No formula was needed, although the parties usually spoke

what they could remember of the genuine marriage-service ; then gifts were exchanged, although that was not essential to make the contract binding. After that the two were married, so long as they had not dealt fleshly together, then might they bed and scorn the ill-talk of neighbours. They were man and wife as assuredly as if the Church itself had blessed them, but it was usual for them later to go before a priest. This undoubtedly was what Kate and Dereham had done ; she in her innocence had plighted herself to a villain. And now he was holding the threat of exposure over her ! That's why he had come to Court—to bleed her of her little savings ! the rascal ! How old could she have been at the time ? probably only thirteen or fourteen, and he a grown man ! Poor dear, how she must have suffered !

Culpeper wanted to go to her, to comfort her. He wondered if the King was angry. Only with Dereham, surely ? not with her ? How could one blame her ? She had been the penniless daughter of a ninth son ; she came of a great family but had no hopes of preferment for herself, although her father had been Marshal of the English army at Flodden ; and this rascal pirate had glamoured her with his conceits and gaudy clothes.

The rogue !

At six o'clock Culpeper went to wait upon his King. He felt very sorry for the King. How the poor man must have suffered ! to think that that sweet wife of his had all the while been hiding that childhood indiscretion, praying perhaps that Dereham had been killed in his ship ! Poor Henry ! He looked wretched. Both men looked wretched—King and courtier, age and youth—as they gazed into their haggard faces, both stricken with love.

" Every day you look worse," said the King sadly. " It breaks my heart to see you. Who is the wicked,

iron-hearted wench who holds you off?" He sighed and groaned. Somehow the lad's sorrow comforted him: it showed that age alone was not made a mock of by women. "Or has she proved unchaste?" said he, looking with sudden interest at Culpeper. "You are not secretly married without your master's leave?"

"Upon my honour, your grace, I am not married."

"No, not married? Then all your suffering is before you." Henry turned to Southampton. "Have you written your report, my lord?" he asked.

Southampton nodded gravely, and on his knees proffered the King a sealed letter. With shaking hand the King took it and jealously put it beside him on the chair, stroking it as if it were a pet.

"By the way, lad," said the King with sudden suspicion lighting his golden eyes, "you were very friendly with this pirate?"

"Francis Dereham, your grace?"

"Yes," said the King, "Francis Dereham."

With a mighty effort Culpeper controlled himself and made his voice sound normal. "Nay, your grace, he was no friend of mine. He happed to lodge at the same inn as I at Pomfret, and because of that he was lodged temporarily with me here at Court."

"Did you talk much together, of women?" said the King eagerly.

"Never, your grace. He was a boaster, but he never boasted of women, only of his strength. For that reason, I crave your forgiveness for my shameful playing on the tennis court yesterday. He had enraged me because he could play better than I. He beat me at everything, and my pride could not bear it."

"He beat you at everything?" repeated the King tenderly. "Come here, boy."

When Culpeper had knelt before him, Henry put his arm round his neck, and lifted his chin so that he could look into the lad's eyes.

"You hate this man because he beat you at everything?" he asked.

"To my shame, your grace, I confess it; at riding, at archery, at wrestling, at bowls, even at drinking, he beat me at every turn; and then we tried tennis, and again he beat me."

"He is a giant, this Dereham. He's almost as tall as I, and he is as fair as I was before time put wool in my beard." Henry sighed and blinked, as he always did when he was agitated. "What would you say if I told you that he had beaten me too?"

"I would find it very difficult to believe, your grace."

"Yet it is so. Nay, Mr. Secretary, don't make such ugly faces at your King. Why shouldn't I speak my heart to the lad? Look at his face, look at love's suffering there! There is no milk in your hearts, it is all ink. I and this boy have suffered. I am sick of you men who talk and talk and tell me what to do as if my love was something to be dried with sand, that could be scraped up like old writing in a book. None of you have loved, none of you can understand what pain in love is. I'll talk to this boy, this friend, who has a heart to be pierced. His counsel will be as true as yours and more loving."

He turned again to Culpeper, and shifted irritably while his doublet was being tucked on him as he talked.

"This is for your own ear, boy," he said, "and for none other. Stay back, you men, only my council can come close." And he lowered his voice so that the grooms and pages could not hear.

"I have had dread news of the Queen," he said.

Like cold steel were those words in Culpeper's heart. He strove to keep the fear from showing in his eyes, strove to keep his hands steady.

"Surely, your grace . . ." he began, but the King interrupted him.

"I do not know myself," he whispered. "All I

know is what I have been told. And if I have been deliberately misled"—with dark, furious eyes he glared at Hertford, Wriothesley, and Southampton—"and if I have been deliberately misled," he cried, "I know on whom will fall the penalty. I can't believe it's true. It can't be true. You men haven't seen the look in her eyes when I held her in my arms. What do you know of love and women? I tell you it's a lie, a damned lie! God pray it is a lie. I'll probe it deep even though it probes into my own heart. I'll root the slander out. It can't be truth. She couldn't lie with lips like that. She is too young, too innocent. She came to my arms as undefiled as at her nativity. I tell you it is so. No man depucelled her, no man plucked her childish kisses. I was the first."

He seemed exalted by his rage; then suddenly he bowed his head in his hands.

"Ah, God cannot be so cruel—even to a King!" he groaned.

With a brave effort he held back his emotion, for a King must always be a King.

After Mass, as Culpeper would have bowed his leave, Henry laid his hand on his shoulder, and said, "Nay, boy, don't go: stay with me. I am tired of having men around me who are without heart and soul. Glare as you will, Hertford, the boy stays, he and Will Sommers. I will not be hemmed in alone by you fierce hounds. I want those with me who understand."

Nobody dared object, although Wriothesley twisted his mouth glumly at Audeley; then they followed the King into his Withdrawing Chamber, Will Sommers and Culpeper coming last.

The King took his tall, gilded chair on the low dais, with the arms of England hanging at his back, and the Council sat circular-wise before him, all facing him, with an opening in their centre opposite the King.

Henry chose Will Sommers to sit on his right hand, Culpeper on his left.

"Now," he said grimly, "I uncouple the hounds. You, Wriothesley, Hertford, Southampton, and you, Canterbury, do the worrying of the man, as those who smelt it out. I will sit back and watch with my two friends."

Mr. Secretary bowed and rose to his feet. Walking backwards, he reached the door, opened it, and spoke to the grooms in the Privy Chamber.

They were all silent, waiting, as he stalked back to his place and drew the table closer to him. All the more or less important councillors were present, except the Duke of Norfolk, who was detained in London. Henry had forbidden him the Court for fifteen days, as there was plague about, and he wanted Norfolk to be completely cleared of contagion before he approached the royal presence. But Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, was there, very bored, gazing at his nails; Sir Anthony Browne, Master of the Horse, very troubled and perplexed; Mr. Chancellor, Sir Richard Riche, Chancellor of Augmentations, plainly bored, and examining his shirt-cuffs that fell to the first finger-joints—white linen they were, flowered with black; the Lord High Chamberlain, the Earl of Sussex, gaping at the painted roof; Sir Ralph Sadler, the second Mr. Secretary, watching Riche's cuffs; the new Comptroller of the Household, Sir John Gage, to whom all this was of particular interest, as he was also the new Constable of the Tower of London; Sir Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford, as the brother of the now considered almost divine Jane Seymour, he was very eager and determined to show how pure his sister had been by proving how treacherously her successor had behaved; the Lord Admiral, Sir John Russell, a kindly-eyed, big-bearded man, trying to squint round at Riche's new cuffs; Mr. Secretary, Sir Thomas

Wriothesley, always keen when he smelt blood; the great Fitzwilliam, Earl of Southampton, sucking in his long under-lip and pushing up his big double chin, caressing his coarse nose with the heavy nostrils, and gazing contemptuously at the roof from little eyes that curled up at the corners; and next to Mr. Secretary, between him and Sommers, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, looking very white and rather frightened.

Culpeper, sitting beside the King and facing the profile of Stephen Gardiner, felt his heart racing furiously; he kept his eyes lowered, for he dared not glance up at those solemn waiting councillors, the great men of the realm of England.

What were they about to do? was it all some play-acting just to make him expose himself? Once, he looked up slyly and found that Will Sommers was watching him with compassionate curiosity over the King's fat legs, and swiftly he looked down at the floor again, at the rushes strewn over the brown-painted boards.

At last, steps were heard approaching through the Privy Chamber, then the rattle of steel, and the door was opened to reveal a group of soldiers, holding their short boar-spears in their right hands, with Francis Dereham in their centre.

"You may let the prisoner enter," said the King.

Alone, Francis Dereham entered the chamber, the door shutting behind him on the guard. Without a sign of fear on his handsome face, his body erect as if he were marching, Dereham walked on until he was at the utmost ring of the councillors; then abruptly he dropped on one knee.

"Stand there," said Mr. Secretary, poking with his pen, "in the centre there, so that his grace can watch you."

Dereham strode boldly into the centre of the group,

and bowed again before the King, who bit irritably at his nails and glared at the man without speaking.

"Address yourself to me, sir!" said Wriothesley. "His Royal Highness has graciously appointed me to deal with this matter. You are apprehended on a charge of piracy committed on the Irish coast. What have you to say to justify your behaviour? Answer me, sir!"

Dereham turned sufficiently to look at Wriothesley without turning his back on the King.

"I have only this to say," he said firmly: "Why wasn't this charge preferred against me sooner? Why have you waited so long?"

"It is not your place to comment, sirrah! How do you plead?"

"Guilty," said Dereham.

"Oh," said Wriothesley, evidently taken aback by Dereham's readiness, and he shuffled the papers before him on the small table; he glanced up at the King, and the King raised one finger as a sign to proceed.

"There are also more serious accusations made against you," said Wriothesley, "which, for his grace's peace of mind, must be probed to the bottom. You are accused of having sinned carnally with Her Majesty Queen Katharine before His Majesty most graciously coupled himself with her. What is your answer?"

"Who accuses me?"

"I have already told you, sir, that it is not your place to question. Answer me this instant. Are you guilty or no?"

"I tell you I will not answer until I hear the accusations made against me."

"We have ways of making men talk," said Wriothesley, smiling, and Hertford sneered: "Evidently the prisoner wishes to assure himself of what is known so that he can know exactly what to confess!"

"Will you plead?" shouted Wriothesley.

"I will not," said Dereham quietly.

There was silence as Wriothesley glared at Dereham like a wild beast about to spring, half leaning on the table. Dereham did not flinch. He gazed back contemptuously and did not even fidget. Much as he hated him, Culpeper could not help admiring the man, and with a feeling of shame he wondered if he would act so bravely if he were caught.

Suddenly Cranmer said, "We mustn't waste all morning. Come, we have not yet had breakfast. Look here, Francis Dereham: we have damning proofs. It will not help you to stay silent. Talk for your own sake, please."

"He stays silent for some one else's sake," scoffed Southampton. "Very noble, very brave, but damnably stupid."

"Men who do not plead," cried Hertford, "are pressed; they are laid on the ground on their backs, and weights and stones are heaped upon their chests until their ribs crack. Did you know that, Dereham?"

"Ay," said Dereham, "I know that."

"Read him the depositions," said Cranmer. "Later, you can get more out of him."

"So that he will know what to say?" cried Hertford, and laughed mirthlessly. "The Archbishop is hungry," he cried, "and justice must wait when food grows cold!"

"I'll make him speak!" shouted Wriothesley, the veins jutting out on his high, thin forehead. "He'll suffer for it, by God!"

"Let him hear the depositions," said Henry in a stifled voice.

Wriothesley glanced up pleadingly. "But, your grace . . ."

"Let him hear them!" snarled Henry. "Are you growing disobedient, man? If you're too weary to

read them all, let him just hear the pretty bits. Don't stand there gaping!"

"I thank your grace for his mercy," said Dereham, bowing.

"Don't talk to me, sir! It is not mercy. I am tired of looking at you, and want this mummery over. On with it, Wriothesley!"

Dereham bowed again and turned to face Mr. Secretary, who was toying with his documents like a fowl pecking at grain. He was scarlet with rage and mortification. What the devil did the King interfere for? It was useless to question a man who knew what to say beforehand.

At last, "I will read you from John Lascelles' deposition," he said, "as that was the first. It was given to his grace the Archbishop of Canterbury during the royal progress and shown to the King at All Souls' last. Master Lascelles is a worthy man with a sad conscience." His eyes sought the eyes of Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, only recently back from his vain embassy to France. The Bishop gazed innocently back. "This man," continued Wriothesley, "this Master Lascelles served the late Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex. He is of the English Church and . . ."

"Enough, enough!" snarled Henry.

Wriothesley bowed, then taking up Lascelles' deposition, he entered straight into the matter of it. "This Lascelles," he said, with all the orator's tricks, the swiftly changing tones, the sudden lifting of the eyelids, the quick, dramatic gestures, "this Lascelles, while His Majesty was on his progress, came to the Archbishop of Canterbury and told him that he had been with a married sister of his, one Mary Lascelles *alias* Hall, in Sussex, who had been servant to the old Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, who brought up the Queen in her house at Lambeth and elsewhere, as you know."

Dereham bowed. Culpeper leaned forward, listening intently, his gaze fixed on Dereham; even the King stopped picking his teeth with his finger-nails, and his eyes went hard and his hands clenched as he heard again that terrible story.

"This Lascelles," continued Wriothesley, "remembering that his sister had known the Queen in her childhood, said to her that she should sue for service with Her Majesty. She said that she would not, but that she was very sorry for the Queen. 'Why?' quoth Lascelles. 'Marry,' quoth she, 'for she is light both in living and in behaviour.' 'How so?' quoth Lascelles. She answered that one, Francis Dereham" —here Wriothesley glanced up slyly at Dereham and smiled a twisted, mocking smile—"that one, Francis Dereham," he repeated with relish, "had lain in bed with the Queen, in doublet and hose, between the sheets, an hundred nights. . . . How say you now, Francis Dereham? Will you plead?"

"I am listening," said Dereham, but his lips twitched.

Culpeper could not shut his eyes, he could not move away, for suddenly he saw young Kate Howard, the Kate he had never known, between the sheets with Francis Dereham, laughing, an hundred nights!—and he had had -how many?—not a dozen!

He almost cried aloud, and set his teeth in his tongue.

Wriothesley went on, glaring at Dereham with an ecstasy of the torturer in his eyes: "And Mary Lascelles *alias* Hall said to her brother that there had been such puffing and blowing . . ."

"Christ!" cried the King almost in a shriek. Culpeper shut his eyes and shuddered. But Dereham did not flinch.

"And another of the maids," continued Wriothesley in a sweet, cooing tone, "said to Mary Lascelles—a maid that slept with the Queen who was then plain Mrs. Howard—she said she would no longer sleep with

her because, so she said, the Queen knew not what matrimony was. And further, Mary Lascelles said that one, Manox . . ."

"That rat!" cried Dereham. "The dirty, lying rat!"

"You know Manox?"

"I know the rat, and would to God that I had killed him as I swore I would!"

"You will speak now—everything?"

"I will speak nothing. Continue the lies."

Who was this Manox? Culpeper felt a sudden shudder run along his spine as if he sat in a cold draught of wind and had not known it till that moment. With terrible eagerness he listened to what Wriothesley would say, and as he listened, he almost swooned with the horror of it, and the blinding pain of jealous rage.

"This Manox," said Wriothesley, smiling now and tapping his teeth with the end of his pen, "this Manox —says Mary Lascelles—was also sometime a servant in the Dowager Duchess's household at Lambeth; he was a teacher of the virginals, this Manox. And he, says Mary Lascelles, knew a privy mark upon the Queen's body!"

Wriothesley had finished for the moment, and he waited as an actor waits for applause—but he did not wait for applause, he waited for signs of collapse from Dereham, but there were no signs there. He was as arrogant as ever. But if Wriothesley had glanced aside, he would have seen what he sought on two other faces—on the King's and on Culpeper's. Both were drawn and chalk-white, both seemed ready to faint, to die, unable to breathe, as if every word had drained their heart's blood. Lucky was Culpeper that all eyes, except Sommers', were fixed on Dereham: otherwise, surely one of those great cunning men would have known the significance of the horror on his face? But

none thought of looking at him ; he was forgotten, he was insignificant.

" When his grace the Archbishop heard this," continued Wriothesley, " he consulted those of the council then in London—namely, the Lord Privy Seal, the Lord Admiral, and myself. We decided to lay the matter before the King on his return, and did so. Manox and this woman, Lascelles *alias* Hall, were then themselves examined separately. Would you like to hear their depositions, too, Francis Dereham ? "

" Proceed," said Dereham harshly.

Culpeper felt like shouting at them to stop this foolish brutal jest. It was not real. This was not Kate Howard they were talking about, it was another woman, some vile creature who had usurped her name. . . .

Remorselessly, Wriothesley continued : " Mary Lascelles *alias* Hall was examined by the Lord Privy Seal, the Earl of Southampton, here "—Southampton bowed—" and she endorsed all that she had told her brother, and amplified her story. She proved beyond all possible doubt that this Manox, this player on the virginals, knew the Queen carnally, and that she had remonstrated with him for his villainy. And as for Francis Dereham ! she told quite a lot there, for it seems, according to her mark, that one Francis Dereham, a gentleman pensioner of my Lord Norfolk and sometime pirate, was often in the Queen's chamber. The Dowager Duchess was a careless if not a criminal woman. She used to have the keys of the gentlewomen's chamber brought into her chamber at night, and the Queen stole the keys, evidently to have false ones made. And one Alice Wilks *alias* Restwold, recently appointed chamberer to the Queen by you, Francis Dereham, has told Mary Lascelles about the Queen's doings with this Dereham in the old days. You did not know him, did you, Dereham ? He was a

wicked man, he was not noble, like you ! He was a ravisher, a depuceller, a rascal ! He would creep into the gentlewomen's chamber at night with toys and fruit and lascivious foods. And Mrs. Lascelles once said to Mrs. Wilks, ' Let her alone,' says she, ' an' if she holds on as she begins she will be naught within a while.' And so she was—with you, Francis Dereham ! Why did she say that ? Will you plead now ? "

" What did Manox say ? " said Dereham.

" Oh, you want to hear it all, do you ? "

" I want to hear all the lies," said Dereham.

Yes, they were lies ! Dereham was right. Of course they were lies. Culpeper clung to that thought as the one thing that would keep him sane. He listened eagerly so as to miss none of this Manox creature's lies.

" Henry Manox," said Wriothesley, " was examined by his grace the Archbishop and myself at Lambeth. And this is what he told us : He went to the Dowager Duchess's home five years past. He and one Barnes were appointed to teach the Queen, then Mrs. Katharine Howard, to play upon the virginal. She was then not fourteen. He fell in love with her, and she, he says, with him."

" Liar ! " cried Dereham.

Wriothesley paused and cocked his head at Dereham as if waiting for more ; as Dereham remained silent, he continued : " And she, he says, fell in love with him. Five years ago, this was, just before Francis Dereham came to the house. But when he came, ah, things were different ! Although Manox had known the Queen carnally . . . "

" By God, no ! "

" Manox had known the Queen carnally," repeated Wriothesley with emphasis. " In his own words he says : ' I have known her carnally many times and used to feel the secrets of her body ere ever Dereham was familiar with her.' . . . "

"I tell you the man's a liar, a dirty liar!" shouted Dereham, losing his temper at last, and fumbling where his sword should have hung.

"Perhaps, then, you will tell us the truth?" suggested Hertford.

"I tell you he's a liar—and that's enough!"

Culpeper loved him at that moment. He seemed a god standing in the centre of that group of councillors, the faint sun glinting on his forked golden beard and cropped head, his pale blue eyes narrow and shining with a light almost of madness. Culpeper could have worshipped him, and even the King looked up with new interest, new hope.

What if it all was lies?

"Lies! every bit of it!" shouted Dereham. "How can men tell such lies!"

"Then you don't wish to hear it?"

"Yes, all of it! Every dirty lie so that I'll know how rottenly he stinks! the rogue! Why didn't I kill him when I had the chance! A miserable, white-faced creature, a plucker at gut-strings and ivory-keys for a mean living! I could have killed him with one hand! Why didn't I? Tell me it all. I will be patient, but I have gone over all this before, many times, and I know, I know he lied. From the very first he lied. I will be patient. God damn him! Tell me everything that the rat said!"

Wriothesley shrugged his narrow shoulders, coughed, and smiled.

"Everything?" he murmured. "It is an old tune, but you will hear it if you wish. . . . This Francis Dereham, who was the Dowager Duchess's kinsman, also loved Mrs. Katharine, saith Manox; and Dereham and one Edward Walgrave—who is now in Prince Edward's household—used to haunt Mrs. Katharine's chamber nightly, for Walgrave loved a maid named Baskerville who slept in the same bed as Mrs. Katharine.

They used to have midnight banquets there until two or three a.m.; so this Manox and this Barnes once wrote an anonymous letter to the Duchess, warning her that if she would rise but half an hour after going to bed, and would visit the gentlewomen's chamber, she would be rather surprised and displeased. The Duchess thereupon stormed with her women, and Mrs. Katharine afterwards stole the letter and showed it to this Francis Dereham, and this Francis Dereham suspected the author and called Manox knave to his face. Was it not curious that one of Mrs. Katharine's bedmates, a woman called Bulmer, should later, when Mrs. Katharine became Queen, be given presents by Mrs. Katharine?"

"Is that all?" asked Dereham, taking a deep breath.

"That is all—so far, but I have here a list of names belonging to people to be questioned. There is this Bulmer woman; there is Alice Wilks *alias* Restwold; Edward Walgrave; the Baskerville wench; the Dowager Duchess's porter, John Walshman; her grooms, John Baynet and Richard Faver; her manservant, Robert Damport; her chamberers, Margery, Dorothy Dawby, Katharine Tylney (now chamberer to the Queen), Malyn Tylney, widow; and, of course, yourself—Francis Dereham."

Dereham gazed around at the intent faces. He saw Culpeper, but made no sign of recognition; he gazed with compassion upon the King, who was watching him with little frightened eyes.

"What do you plead now?" asked Wriothesley.

"I plead . . ." said Dereham. He groaned, and said suddenly: "I plead—guilty. . . ."

Wriothesley smiled and sat back. The King's body seemed to sag as if no bones were left to support it; he looked terribly old and very pathetic. Round-eyed, Culpeper gazed at Dereham.

"But there was no misconduct!" cried Dereham,

"such as you say and as that liar Manox says. What we did, we did in the sight of God, fearlessly. She was my wife."

"Your wife!" cried the King.

"My wife, before God and man! We plighted our troth. We swore on the Holy Book to be man and wife. I said to her: 'I take thee, Katharine, as my wife until death do us part,' and she put her hand in mine and she said, 'I take thee, Frank, to be my husband until death do us part.' And we kissed and gave gifts and were loving. We were to church it when I had money enough to show her to the world. Before God, I speak the truth. She is my wife, my wife, and you cannot tear us asunder. By God, you cannot tear us asunder. And I say again that Manox is a cur and a liar. He never touched her, he never touched her hand. He is a liar, a liar before God!"

"Take him away!" cried the King, leaping suddenly to his feet. "Take him away before I kill him!"

"Kill me or not, your grace! she is my wife!"

"Away with him, to the Tower, before I kill the rogue!" The King was on his feet, bellowing like a wounded bull. To the last, he had hoped and prayed that it was not true. All his hopes now were gone. She had been Dereham's! That man had clasped her in his arms, had held the young, uncrowned Queen in his arms! It was sacrilege! treachery! treason! "Take him away, take him!" he cried. He sank back, coughing, sank inside his clothes as if they were suddenly too big for him.

The councillors rushed to help him, knocking over their chairs and stools; but Wriothesley and Hertford kept their heads enough to force Dereham to the door where the guards awaited him.

Dereham was drunk with excitement, with rage and exultation; he was like a martyr going to the stake.

He had no control over himself. He grinned, and all the while they pushed him to the door, he bellowed like a madman, shouting, "She's mine, mine, mine! I tell you she's mine, all mine, I had her first; torture me, kill me, you can't take her from me, you can't rob me of that, King as you are, you can't, you can't——"

The words seemed to be knocked back into his mouth as one of the guards hit him on the jaw with the butt of his spear.

"All of you, leave me," gasped the King, trying to push his councillors away with weak arms. "I want to be alone."

They had never before seen him so affected. He was old, as if time had plucked his youth away like a mask from his face and revealed it haggard and pale and sagging at mouth and eyes.

Culpeper went with them, walking backwards, out through the doors, until the King was left alone in his great gilded chair, alone in the room. And he just sat there, his hands loose in his lap.

He did not even weep.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Queen is Interviewed

As soon as he could, Culpeper left the courtiers, went to his own chamber, and locked the door. And with the door locked, he flung himself on his bed and did not move. He lay on his face, sobbing, too exhausted to feel anything, either fear or jealousy, only knowing that his life was worthless and that death was no longer a thing to dread but would come as a divine release.

Unmoving, in a trance of despair, he lay upon the bed that Francis Dereham would never stretch his long legs on again.

And outside, in the palace, men and women were whispering; their whispers reached Kath Tylney, and she told the Queen, but the Queen did not believe her. Had not the King sent Master Henneage to say that he was indisposed? If he suspected her, he would not be so courteous as that.

No, he knew nothing, said Kate, and sat among her women, the only cheerful woman there.

Norfolk came to Hampton Court. His gay clothes were drenched by the rain and his own sweat. All the long journey from London he could not sit still under the bright, embroidered awning. He had poked out his head at the rain, had stumbled up and down between the rowers, urging them to stronger efforts. He felt his great hands itching to grasp an oar. Norfolk was a powerful man, although he was small and thin; he was strong, all muscle, despite his age—for he was nearly seventy—an heroic and a dangerous man. He was a soldier and a Catholic, genuinely pious beneath

the hard exterior that was toughened in battles, his skin chafed to leather by the constant weight of armour, his tongue coarsened by camp-talk. But he was sincere, and dreaded only God and his King. Women were nothing to him ; they were playthings that fools took seriously. His wife had many a pretty tale to tell of his behaviour. When he was making merry with bold Bess Holland, who had been one of Anne Boleyn's ladies, and his wife the Duchess had refused to have the wench in her house, Norfolk had merely grinned and let Bess and her friends deal with her, and they punched and scratched her like a flock of bears and cats ; as the Duchess said, "They sat on my breasts till I spat blood, all for speaking against Bess Holland in the Court." And again Norfolk had ridden hard all night so that he could have the joy of locking his wife in her chamber and taking all her jewels and clothes away. That was what Norfolk thought of women. Yet always women had interfered with his life, he was for ever quarrelling with them, and they did all they could to ruin him : Nan Bullen, and now Kate Howard, both his nieces. Could the King forgive him for being related to such traitorous females ?

He cursed the rowers and ground his teeth. He wanted to be active. Why hadn't he ridden ? why had he taken this barge ? His family had never loved him. They were all traitors, always messing with women : that egg-faced fool of a son of his, Surrey, who trolled out mincing verses, he'd be involved soon with some high-placed female like that lunatic, Tom Howard, who had betrothed himself to Lady Margaret Douglas and been given a cell in the Tower to honeymoon in ! By God, he'd burn the witch ! Why were the rowers so slow ? It was all Cranmer's sly game. Cranmer had been the first to tell the King. It was a deliberate blow at him, at him, the champion of the old Faith, the true Faith. He'd break Cranmer yet.

At last, even London watermen must reach their objective; and the turrets and chimneys of Hampton Court rose through the misty rain towards an exhausted Norfolk, late this Saturday afternoon.

He leaped out of his barge, darted up the steps and along the Water Gallery to the palace, his thin mouth tight-set. He arrived, dripping wet, in the King's Great Watching Chamber. He would have stridden on, but the grooms told him that His Majesty was indisposed and must not be disturbed. The council, they added, had retired to the Archbishop's rooms in the Chapel.

So down to the Chapel went Norfolk. He was eager to see the King, to convince him that he was true even though all his family turned traitorous. And he had been cooped up in London because the plague had showed its fangs. But the matter was urgent, and plague or no plague, Henry had sent for Norfolk.

"Ah, my lord!" cried Gardiner, delighted. "We were waiting for you before we called upon the Queen, your niece."

"My devil!" snapped Norfolk. "Come, let us go!"

"You can't go like that," cried Sir Anthony Browne; "my lord, you are soaked!"

"I have all night to change in," cried Norfolk. "Let us waste no time!"

All the council were not going. It had been decided that Norfolk, Cranmer, Gardiner, Lord Chancellor Audeley and Sussex, the Lord Great Chamberlain, should represent them; so these three lords and two churchmen solemnly strode over the green Chapel Court, up the stairs into Prince Edward's empty Nursery, and so into the Queen's Gallery that had been built for Anne Boleyn but, like so many of Anne Boleyn's things, was finished for Jane Seymour. On both sides were windows, and between the windows were hooked the most superb of Wolsey's tapestries, for Wolsey had been a connoisseur of tapestries; the walls

curved, and in their centre to the east, facing the park, was an immense circular bay window of twenty lights, and on each side of the walls that were 25 feet apart, were five other large windows. All these windows shone with coloured glass, the colours and signs and mottoes of Henry and Jane, while the cornice and frieze were of intricate fretwork, painted and gilt; the ceiling seemed to be melting into over a thousand balls of burnished gold, surrounded by gilt leaves. It was the most beautiful apartment in all Hampton Court, and stretched for 180 feet.

The Queen was there when these councillors entered gravely. She was playing on the virginal, and suddenly she heard Tylney cry, "Christ save us! look who comes!" and she glanced up, startled, to see her unannounced visitors approaching.

"Leave me," she said quickly, "leave me, all of you. . . ."

"But, your grace, what can it mean?"

"Leave me," repeated Kate, "all of you!"

Then alone, she waited for them to come, and, when they were close, she dropped into a curtsy.

"When was it usual," she asked sweetly, "for gentlemen to enter ladies' chambers unannounced?"

"When ladies lose all womanhood," snarled Norfolk, "and turn whore!"

"My lord!" Cranmer put his hand on his sleeve, but Norfolk flung it off.

"Don't touch me, sir!" he cried. "I am mad with rage. There, she can stand and look at us without a blush, without a quiver of shame! Ah, God, when were women so lost to shame that not only can they foul a man's bed, but can look their accusers in the eyes as if they were Susannahs!"

"My lord," said Audeley, "this is not the way to talk."

"Stand back, sirs! her blood is mine; when did the venom steal into it? Was ever man so plagued as I!

We are an unhappy family, we Howards. Why should women have such hot blood that even a King can't satisfy them?"

"You forget, my lord," said Gardiner, "that nothing is even thought of after marriage. It is only before the King honoured her that we know of."

"Ay, that we know of! Look at her, sirs! Is she not sweet and good and kind and rotten—rotten to the heart inside! If thus before marriage, what afterwards? I doubt not that every man at Court—mayhap, sirs, some of you—have mouthed her behind the door! She is a witch and should be burnt!"

The others stood back, aghast. Whatever hopes they had had of wringing a confession from Kate was now gone definitely with this lunatic of a Norfolk ranting in such a way. She stood, very white, very dignified, a half-smile on her full red mouth, gazing at Norfolk sadly.

"Ah, my lord, you know not what you say," she murmured softly.

"I know too well!" he cried. "Ah, what a pretty pussy she is, how sweet, my lords, to huggle on a cold night! A naughty pack born out of this vile talk of to-day when the Bible's mauled by dirty un-understanding little fingers, when God's no longer close but lost behind a mesh of words! I would that I could kill her where she stands and thus save the honour of my house! I cannot understand this world—how can men find delight in such lumps of carrion as this! This horrid sin of the delight of the flesh—how can men peril their souls because of it! I say that women are the foul fiends garbed in pretty bodies to entangle men!"

"My lord, my lord!" cried Gardiner, twisting with fear and embarrassment, "we must leave her."

"Leave her, and she has not spoken!" Norfolk glared at him. "Harkee, wench," he cried, turning again to Kate, "we have come to learn what lies you can think of. . . ."

"Your grace . . ."

"Call her Your Royal Whore!"

"Your grace," said Gardiner desperately, "there have been foul accusations made against you. . . ."

"Foul truths!" cried Norfolk, with a mad laugh, "and she cannot even blush!"

"And they seem truth, for witnesses have given them to us without questioning." Gardiner spoke hurriedly lest Norfolk again interfere. "They are accusations against your life before marriage with His Majesty. It is said that one Manox and one Dereham——"

"Which makes two!" cried Norfolk, "and two men make one whore!"

"And that Manox and Dereham have lain in bed with you between the sheets at the house of the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk——"

"All Howards!" cried Norfolk. "This Francis Dereham was one of my men. I bred him in my house. I paid him money. And he snuggled against my niece. I ask you, gentlemen, if it would not be but justice to use my sword on her!"

He glared around him, panting with rage, his eyes seeming enormous. They squinted a little, those eyes of his; and now that he felt such rage in his heart, there was genuine murder shining in them. And he felt like committing murder. All the years of hardship, of building up his power against envy and hatred, and of standing secure beside the King—were they all to be wrecked because his niece was a whore? He had survived the fall of Anne Boleyn, and now again he was in the same perilous corner, betrayed by a woman. . . .

"My lord," said Gardiner earnestly, "you must listen to me. Remember, I am your ghostly father to whom you have come in your nobility and shrived your heart of every venial sin. I command you to be silent!"

Norfolk glared at him, then he mastered himself, and bowed.

"I'll say no more," he muttered.

"I think," said Audeley, "that we had better leave Her Majesty, for the moment, at least. Perhaps his grace the Archbishop might return later and see her, alone?"

The others nodded quietly.

"But she hasn't yet answered!" groaned Norfolk.

"Later," said Gardiner. "We will see her later."

KATE kept control of herself until they had turned the corner; then she sank on to her knees. The world was tossed before her in a white mist that spiralled to black. She heard very remotely the sound of her head striking the floor . . . and her lips were moving as the world reformed itself before her eyes; her lips were moving in a hymn to the Virgin that she had learned in childhood and had forgotten until this moment. She listened to the words as if they were spoken by somebody else:

"*Hail, Crowned Queen, fairest of all!*
Hail that all our bliss is bred!
Hail that all women on do call
In times when they be hard bestead!
Hail thou that all fiends dread
And shall do till the day of doom!
With maiden's milk thy Son thou fed,
O Maria, flos virginum!"

Like distant music the words came to her, and she gazed about her, wondering who it was that sang, then realised that she herself was whispering the words, as if they were a charm to banish all evil:

"*Hail, spice sweetest of savour!*
Hail that all our joys from come!
Hail of all women fruit and flower!
Velud rosa vel lilium."

She had forgotten that song. Had the Virgin sent it to her in her evil hour? Where had it come from? She could remember no more of it, and shook herself, sighing, then wondered to feel a rush's slimy caress on her cheek.

She was on the floor! She did not remember falling.

She caught the music-stool and pulled herself up. She ached as if she had been thrashed. Then suddenly it all came back: her uncle calling her vile names, the others striving to hold him from saying too much; their frightened faces; Norfolk's red face, dark with rage, the eyes like hot coals. . . . She almost screamed at the memory, then sighed to find herself alone. Alone . . . thank God, alone. . . .

So the King knew, after all? knew about Manox and Dereham? She did not care what he knew, so long as Culpeper was safe.

I will die if he is taken, she thought dully.

She glanced up and found that Cranmer was standing very near, gazing compassionately at her.

"Your grace," he said, "you will please forgive me. Did I frighten you?"

"A moment. I am not quite myself. My uncle's words . . ." Her hands fluttered about her dress, re-arranging the high collar, smoothing the sleeves, although she was not aware of what she did. "I cannot understand," she murmured. "It is all so sudden and so frightening. I didn't hear you." Nobody ever did hear Cranmer: he walked on his toes, he seemed to be wafted along. "You walk so silently. What is it all about?"

"Please don't be distressed," he said gently. "Your uncle is a violent man and easily loses his temper. He has just arrived from London and has heard only rumours, which are always worse than the truth."

"I have no friend. I am alone." She did not feel afraid now. There was something about Cranmer

that was very reassuring, and she gazed pleadingly at him. "Please tell me of what I am accused, your grace," she asked. "I am a defenceless woman, remember, hemmed in on all sides, and I do not know where to turn."

"It is about your life before marriage," he said. "May I sit?" She waved impatiently, and he sat down slowly on the stool before he continued. "About you and one Henry Manox and one Francis Dereham," he said.

"Where is Dereham now?"

"He is in the Tower," said Cranmer. There was something in the way he looked aside from the corners of his eyelids that gave a terrible meaning to the word "Tower." Instantly Kate saw a vision, a vision of black horror, of a dark room with a strong man groaning as the rack tore his bones from their sockets.

"Jesu!" she cried. "The Tower!"

She darted to her feet and cried, "They are not . . .?"

Cranmer bowed, and she knew that her vision was true: Dereham was being tortured; they were tearing a confession out of him!

"Oh, my God!" she cried. "What can I do? It isn't fair!" Suddenly she saw the terrible pit before her; not only Dereham, but she too was poised there, she and Culpeper! The Tower! Nan Bullen had been to the Tower! Nan Bullen had died within those walls! And now she would have to go! They mustn't learn about Culpeper. Ah, God, dear God, they mustn't!

Cranmer watched her sorrowfully.

"Your grace, your grace," he stuttered.

He had intended, when he came, to exaggerate her sin, then to tell her of the justice of English law, then to wind up with a solemn suggestion of the King's mercy; but that was useless now. He had not ex-

pected the blow to be so devastating. He feared that she would go mad, and swiftly reversed his plan.

"Remember, your grace, that the King has a most merciful heart," he cried, "and has loved you deeply, deeper than I have ever known him to love any woman."

That was a blow, a cruel blow. It brought tears of shame to her eyes, it made her feel ill with shame.

"I am a vile creature!" she moaned; then she wailed, and beat her fists on the window. "Alas, alas, that I'm alive! Fear of death does not grieve me so much as the memory of the King's goodness! When I remember how kind he was, how gracious, how loving, I could go mad, mad! Oh, this sudden mercy is too terrible? Rather his hate. I didn't expect it, I don't deserve it. It makes me viler than I was, more contemptible. The more I think of his kindness the more terrible it makes me feel. Why do I live who am so enormous a sinner! He loved me, wretch that I am, he loved me, and I, my God! how I have repaid his love! I am a foul wretch, unclean, and loathsome! Can God forgive such as beast as I! Your grace, your grace, what can I do to be forgiven?"

'Sin is only really mortal when it is hidden in your own breast," said Cranmer. "Shrive yourself, my child, and you will find that your sins lighten with the peace of God's understanding."

"For every act of adultery you burn five years in purgatory?" she murmured.

"What comes before marriage is not adultery," said Cranmer. "Take me as your confessor. Tell me everything."

"Everything? Yes, yes, I will tell you. . . ." She would tell him everything—except about Culpeper. It would distract them, send them from Culpeper.

"Listen carefully, I will tell you all." She brushed the tears away and looked very firm and brave. "But

first, I must see that we aren't interrupted." She ran to the door and bolted it firmly. "Now," she said, settling herself on a stool and brushing her skirt down around her, "I will tell you everything.

"It was at Lambeth . . ." she began, talking swiftly and seemingly perfectly at her ease; it was only by talk that she could conquer her fears and the agony that rose to her brain and dizzied her. She flung herself swiftly into the past in an effort to forget the present.

Cranmer leaned forward and listened carefully, sadly.

"It was at Lambeth," she said, "when my cousin-german, Anne Boleyn, was marrying with the King. There it was that Mary Lascelles was chamberer, and she loved young Henry Manox, who was to teach us girls the virginal. I was not then thirteen, your grace, just past the guerdon of childhood and the age of marrying. But I was a big damsel, ripe and marriageable, but poor, desperately poor, and was looked after by the darling Dowager Duchess of Norfolk now that both my father and mother were dead. She was very kind to me, but careless. I had talks with the maids as if they were my equals, and in particular, with this Mary Lascelles who loved Harry Manox. . . ."

Mary Lascelles, thin-bodied, thin-mouthed, you could see the bones in her shoulders, across her chest and poking up at the throat. Mary Lascelles, you were a prim woman outwards to the world, but you loved Harry Manox, and why did you suddenly take down the thin hangings over your chamber-windows and nail up buckram ones? Could Harry Manox tell? You had a chamber to yourself for a while, but suddenly the Dowager turned you out and made you sleep with Alice Wilks. Why was that, Mary Lascelles?

And because Manox one day, teaching Kate the virginal, caught her hands as they played over the ivory keys and leaned over to her so that she felt his

breath warm through the hair above her brow—because of this Lascelles came to her. "He is a rogue, that Manox," Lascelles said to Kate: "Dorothy Barwick said to me yesterday that you were plighted to him." Kate had smiled up at her. "Nay—not plighted," she said slyly, and saw Lascelles' peaked face grow red. "Mistress Kate, you must beware that man," said Lascelles, "I said to him this morn: 'Man!' I said, 'what do you mean by playing the fool in this fashion? for if the Lady of Norfolk knew of your loving Mistress Kate she'd undo you quick enough. And besides,' said I, 'she comes of a noble house and if you married her, some of her blood would kill you.'" "And," said Kate dreamily, "and what did he say?" "The rascal turned on me!" cried Lascelles, wringing her skinny hands, "he turned on me and swore with a horrid oath that his designs on you were perfectly dishonourable and that he had no thought of marrying with you. And he said too, Mistress Kate, he said: 'And from the liberties the young lady has allowed me,' he said—his very words—'from the liberties the young lady has allowed me, I doubt of being idle in reaching my aim.'" "He did say that?" cried Kate. "Ay, Mistress Kate, that he did!"

"And, ah, your grace!" Kate cried piteously, "undoubtedly he had said those wicked words! I found out later, as you shall hear, how cruel, how bloodless was his heart. I was mad because he had said he could take me so easily. I was not thirteen, remember, your grace, and a young girl is all vanity. My women whispered to me how beautiful I was, and I would sit for hours blinking into a mirror, mouthing at my own reflection. I thought of nothing but my own beauty and of jetting it boldly before a crowd of amorous courtiers in a galliard. I had no young man near me but this Manox. And when Lascelles came with her tale, it broke my simple vanity to pieces, and I took

horse to my Lord Beaumont's house where Manox then was, and there I called him all that I could think of, and wept and hated him. But he took me in his arms and whispered to me with his sugared tongue, and young blood is swiftly warmed, the skin is but chafed, and vile lusts are brought to the heart. I was too young to know what wickedness meant. He said that his passion for me had so transported him beyond the bounds of reason that he had wist not what he said. And I, stupid I, believed him! I was so lost to shame that I could steal out with the hood drawn over my face and see him like that in the servants' quarters and ask why he spoke wickedly of me! I deserve all that God brings upon me—yet what can a young girl do? It was not the Katharine Howard who sits here now with you, your grace. If I'd the power, I'd kill that child I was; but how can I wipe her out? It wasn't I, not Kate Howard, it was a wilful fleshly creature. The bare thought of her fills me with loathing."

But was that true? It might be shameful to remember, yet it was sweet. The bitterness of that remembered day when wandering in the orchard at Lambeth, Manox had stolen upon her and kissed her on the mouth suddenly in the sunlight. . . .

"Then Frank Dercham came, your grace. I was just thirteen and he dazzled me with his gay talk. He loved me, I think. He was not like Manox. He was kind and good and would have married me. That's why he turned pirate, to get money to marry me with. I know he loved me and I never let him learn the truth about Manox. He would have killed him had he known. He heard tales, of course, but he never believed them. He trusted me. Manox was different. I was a child then, I didn't understand. But when Frank, when Dereham came, I knew what love was. . . . Not real love! Pity me, your grace, I know not what I say! But he was very kind and loving. I was

simple and did not know. I gave him everything. . . . Ah, God! if we could but forget the past!"

She wept, and rubbed her hair over her eyelids to dry the tears, and bit her hair and wrung her hands.

"Ah God, your grace," she cried, "am I the only woman to have sinned in youth! Why should I be the one to suffer so! Yet, I deserve it all! I did not heed God. I did not understand what He meant. I did not know it was sin. Not really sin. The Duchess loved Dereham like a son, but he was so good you could not help but love him. He was not wealthy, yet he gave to me all he had. Girls lust for finery, your grace, and I had no money. He bought me gifts, the little toys that soften a maid. Why do I call myself a maid? I was a sinful beast who joyed in fleshly sins. I let him into my chamber. He would come with his friend who loved a maid who slept with me, and we would tumble, all four, in bed. But we were plighted. It was not sin if we were plighted, was it, your grace?"

"If you had not married again," he murmured sadly, "it would have been no sin. Matrimony contracted *per verba de præsenti* is perfect matrimony before God."

"It is, I know it is. We clasped hands one night and married ourselves by the moon, standing at the window. It was cold, I remember, and he wrapped his doublet about me and held me tight; and Baskerville, she was the other maid, she cried to us to come from the window lest we be seen. And we left the window. He would bring fruits and comfits and we would have rere-suppers together. It was very jolly. I did not know it was sin. The Duchess would lock us in at night, but I stole the keys and we had others made, and so they came to us. But we were married. I always called him husband and he called me wife. It sounded strange at first to be called wife, strange and very sweet. I longed to hear him say it, and I loved

calling him my husband. I remember when he first called me wife. He kissed me in daylight before strangers, and one man jeered at him for it. Frank turned to him with his merry smile and asked the fellow who should hinder him from kissing his own wife. Never will I forget the joy that went through me and struck the very marrow of my bones ; it filled me with voluptuous joy to hear him say—'my wife.' And the fellow who had spoken before, he laughed now and said, 'I trow this matter will come to pass, as the common saying is.' 'What is that?' asks Frank. 'Marry!' said the man, 'that Mr. Dereham will have Mrs. Katharine Howard!' and we all laughed as if it were a jest, like children, and Frank laughed and kissed me again. 'By St. John!' cried Frank, 'you may guess twice and guess worse.' . . . Yet there was no evil really between us, we were man and wife. No evil, was there, your grace? As for Manox, he was a knave! He was jealous and he wrote to the Dowager Duchess telling her to come at night to our chamber after she had gone to bed, and he left it in her pew in chapel, and she came and caught us eating, but not worse, God be praised. But afterwards one day she caught me and Frank kissing, and she smacked us both hard in the ears : and Joan Bulmer who stood by, she smacked her ears too, just because she was there, and the Duchess was in such a rage that she had to smack everybody. And my uncle, my Lord William, was angrier with Manox than with us. 'What mad wenches!' he cried, vexed at being disturbed. 'What mad wenches! can't you be merry amongst yourselves but you must then fall out!' I stole that letter of Manox's from the Duchess and I showed it to Frank, and Frank swore that it was Manox who wrote it, and would have killed the knave, but that I would not let him do."

Her voice died gently away. She was not crying

now. She was back in her girlhood. She could remember Frank Dereham when he clipped and kissed her in his brave arms before he sailed a-pirating. She saw again the golden beard, the merry blue eyes. She was so tiny, she did not reach above his arm-pit. His beard tickled her throat when he kissed her. His eyes were always laughing.

"It was not sinful," she murmured. "But I was not bred like other girls. I had no father or mother, I had few lessons, nobody troubled about us. Lord William was too busy with State affairs, the Duchess was kind and never thought harm of anybody. She just let us grow up anyhow, and never conceived that evil might spring out of our ignorance. She was such a dear. It wasn't her fault. If only I had had a father or mother—but I had none to turn to but my women, and they were all loving different men. I thought it was just the usual thing for a girl to have a paramour. I was so sinful, but only because I had no light to see the truth by. You will tell the King that, won't you?"

At the word "King" she blushed. It brought back to her the disgrace she was in. He had trusted her, this King; she had made him young again with her vitality. Like a dying oak, he had sent forth little blossoms under the warm, young sun of her youth. All that was gone now. It was not the oak tearing down the ivy, it was the ivy that was so embedded in the oak that it ripped the sap-sweet bark from the tree when it fell. He would never be the same man again. That she knew. And all because she could not help being wicked!

"Oh, I am so wicked, so wicked!" she sobbed.

It was growing dark, but no candles were brought. On the other side of the bolted door her women whispered and clung together; and in the long gallery, Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, sat with

tear-wet eyes gazing on the young Queen who was again a little girl before him. It would have brought pity from any man's heart to see her as she leaned forward, hands pressed between her knees as if imprisoned there, her dress disordered where she had torn it in her frenzy, her hair fallen in long strands from the braiding, and hanging down with pearls and jewels clinging to it like bright little insects.

It grew dark, and the rain stopped. The moon came up from behind enormous clouds and shone with unusual brightness, although daylight still clung feebly to the earth. It was very dark in the gallery, the fire had burnt down, unfed, and glittered with scarlet, baleful eyes amongst the charred wood and lifeless coal. But neither Cranmer nor the Queen felt a chill in the air; they sat, drawn together in the companionship of suffering, when suddenly she wailed in a piercing voice:

"O Christ, Christ, Christ!"

"What is it?" Cranmer started, shocked by that cry that was like the cry of death. "What is it, your grace?"

"Ah, Christ, your grace, this light brings back sudden remembrances. About this time Master Henneagé was wont to bring me knowledge of the King!"

About this time, Master Henneage, discreet Master Henneage, would whisper to her, telling her if she was to be alone that night or whether the King would come or would call for her. Never again! What a vile beast she had been, shuddering at having to go to him, the poor darling! His caresses had been like the tasting of medicine, had jarred on every nerve of her body. And he, poor dear, he had not known what she had been thinking. It would have killed him. How she shut her eyes and strove to think of Culpeper. She had been cruel. She should have tried to love him. He had had such a terrible life with all those horrid

women, one after another ; she was viler than any of them, for she had only carnal lust for excuse . . . she was the vilest woman in all Britain. Queen Katharine from Aragon had had no lover, save perhaps her confessor, who was later taken for fornication, but that was before she married Henry ; Nan Bullen, too, had had lemans before marriage—Wyatt and Percy, if not others, like King Francis I—but Kate did not doubt that she was true afterwards except, mayhap, with Smeaton ; there had been whispers of Jane Seymour before her marriage—never afterwards ; no slur was cast on Anne of Cleves, except by Henry's own imagination, only now, since the divorce, people said that she had had a child ; ah, she was the vilest of them all ! Poor, poor Harry, what a worrying time he had had with all those wretched women ! Kate hated her sex. Their bodies owned their souls and dragged them whither the bodies wished. They could be conquered with a touch, a whisper ; there was no truth in them. . . . And now Henry, Cranmer said, would be merciful to her who did not deserve such mercy.

" This sudden mercy," she sobbed, " makes my sins more heinous. What will they do with me, your grace? "

Cranmer shifted on his stool. " I cannot say," he said, " but I should think that they'll put you in a nunnery of some sort where you can devote the rest of your days to God."

" Willingly ! willingly ! If God can want this carcass wretched with corruption and filled with the memory of vile lusts and viler acts, I give it to Him and wish that only I had something worthy to offer Him, something pure and noble. Your grace, I swear to you—upon the rood, I swear it—I have been true since marriage ! "

Why was she not blasted where she sat? She stiffened, expecting God's judgment to fall upon her like a cataclysm. But nothing happened. The world remained the same.

The moon rose high, and spread its violet light through the glass windows of the gallery.

She was not dead, she was not blind nor deaf nor dumb nor palsied! Perhaps God had not heard? But God heard everything. "O Mother Mary," she whispered to herself, "forgive your wretched child this last most terrible sin, but I could not see him suffer. . . . Whatever happens to me on earth or after earth, I do not care if Master Culpeper be safe. . . ."

"In that case," said Cranmer, more lightly, "I don't think you have to fear worse than a religious house of correction."

"And that I pray for!" she cried. "I need all that remains of life so that I may pray for forgiveness. Whatever penance the Church demands, I wouldn't think it too high. It couldn't be too high. When Frank—when Dereham—when Dereham came to Court at Pomfret, he was penniless, and I gave him work. I couldn't let my husband starve, your grace! but never word of love passed between us, not one word. He asked for no gift of love, he did not touch my skin even; he was honest and good, he realised that all that was past. Upon the rood, I swear it!"

"And I believe you," said Cranmer. "You have nothing more to say, your grace?"

"Nothing," she murmured listlessly. "But I do not deserve mercy."

"My child, poor child." Cranmer blessed her with his fingers before he went, and she knelt, sobbing before him, with bowed head.

"Bless you, your grace," she whispered, "bless you. You are a good man."

"And bless you, my child," he answered. "Remember always that God has ordained that suffering can purify the most heinous sin."

And he stepped quietly down the gallery, on tip-toe,

as if he walked from a place made holy by sorrow and martyrdom.

Her women knocked upon the door, and knocked and knocked, until Kate let them in, and sank almost unconscious into their arms. They ripped open her doublet, sprinkled her face, throat, and breasts with rose-water, pushed cordial through her teeth, and asked questions, questions, questions. . . .

Sister Isabel's snake-like face glared at her, sister Isabel's monotonous voice asked her this, asked her that.

"I told him everything, everything," cried Kate wildly. "All before marriage. I kept nothing back."

"You told about Dereham, you fool?"

"Everything! Frank! Manox! everything, I tell you! I kept nothing back! not the smallest sin. . . ."

"We are undone!" screamed Isabel. "Woe to the Howards! woe to the Howards!"

She ran wildly about the gallery, beating her temples while the other women fussed about the almost dead Queen.

Isabel suddenly decided what she should do. She ran to seek her husband, Sir Edward Baynton, the Queen's Vice-Chamberlain, and within ten minutes, Cranmer held a note in his hand. It was signed "Katharine."

He smiled a little sadly as he read it, and looked up at Sir Edward, who had brought it to him.

"I will tell His Majesty," said Cranmer, and added a line to his letter to the King.

Then when Sir Edward was gone, he opened that note again and sighed as he read it through. It was very brief. It said that what Dereham had done to Kate had been by his "importune forcement, and, in a manner, violence. . . ."

Cranmer did not doubt who had written that. He knew that it was not Kate.

CHAPTER TWENTY

At the Chapel Door

THERE ARE THINGS IN LIFE that the mind rejects, that slide from it like water from grease. Culpeper did not believe that the Queen was really guilty. He accepted Dereham, because Dereham was a husband, and in the lover's alphabet husbands are people to be pitied and not envied, which is rather a paradox; it meant to him that Kate simply had two husbands instead of one, not that she had three lovers, which would have been quite a different thing. It was disturbing but not exactly repugnant. Manox, however, was a different matter. But Manox was a liar. Dereham had called him a liar, and Dereham ought to know.

To-day, Sunday, 6th November, they were to leave Hampton Court, although the arrangements were secret. They were to pretend to go hunting, but were to dine at Oatlands, to the west of Hampton Court, and on the other side of the river; then at night they were to steal to London, the Council to meet at Westminster Palace at midnight. Both Sommers and Culpeper were appointed to attend the King.

Culpeper learned this on Sunday morning when he waited to dress Henry. He had expected to find a man deeply wounded by yesterday's experience, but he was unprepared for the wreck he found. Henry was suddenly old and infirm with glazed eyes and shaking hands; he did not speak, but blinked and rolled his head, permitting himself to be washed, barbered, clothed, and escorted to the green room as if he were a gigantic, unwieldy toy.

Then they set out for Mass.

Culpeper, being the least important of the gentlemen, brought up the rear ; before him went Norfolk and the other lords, knights, and gentlemen.

In her chamber, Kate raised her head and listened. She heard the choir singing. The King was there. She felt that if she saw the King, if she could only speak a word to him to tell him how sorry she was and what a good life she would live in future, everything would be forgiven and forgotten. She did not want forgiveness for her own sake. She wanted it for Culpeper's and the King's. Give her a chance to live and she would be his slave, she would make up a thousandfold for every second of sin in her life.

This might be her last chance. . . .

Her women tried to hold her back, but she pushed them off. She flung open the doors. Outside, two yeomen of the guard stood in their scarlet uniform ; they gazed owlishly at her, gaping ; and she ran by them.

One man caught her by the arm, but she turned on him so swiftly, with so defiant a glare in her blue eyes, such a snarl on her heavy mouth, that he let her go instantly like a man scratched by a cat.

" Your grace ! . . . " he cried.

She ran straight ahead, around the Kitchen Court, through the Watching Chamber, and into the gallery. The soldiers awoke to life ; still clutching their short, awkward boar-spears, they trundled after her.

It was Kate's skirt that tripped her. She stumbled against the wall and the men caught her.

" Your grace, you must not. . . ."

" We have our orders. . . ."

" Would you touch your Queen ! "

" We have our orders, your grace. . . ."

She wrestled with them, but they dared not grip her too hard lest they hurt her, and she had no such fears :

she kicked, and bit, and hit. She darted off again. she heard the music of the choir making ready again, and sprang round the corner.

She saw the King. He was just entering his oratory, his men with him.

"Harry!" she cried. "Harry! you must listen to me!"

The King started back as if her words had struck him physically. For one second he remained perfectly still, then he was through the chapel door like a wounded beast rushing to safety.

"Harry! my God, Harry, you must listen! you don't understand!"

The yeomen had caught up to her, but they stood abashed to see those lords at the chapel door.

"Take her away!" said Norfolk fiercely. "Don't worry about being tender. A little harshness may subdue her flesh."

She fenced them off with weak hands, screaming all the while for Henry to listen to her. Culpeper, the sweat of horror on his face, leaned against the wall, shuddering. The woman he loved was there, fighting with men, and he must stand here doing nothing. He must go to her, he must save her; if even they killed him, he must fight them, he must. . . .

She was caught now. The soldiers were dragging her back. She half fell, and they lifted her as if she were an ordinary woman, not a Queen. Their spears hampered them, and they flung them away.

She fought them; she was lunatic with despair; her screams were like those of a hurt animal, they echoed down the gallery, piercing, terrifying, and unutterably pathetic.

He could not bear it. Culpeper fumbled with his sword-hilt, but he did not draw his sword. He felt somebody groping for his hand, and turned to find Somners beside him, pressed against him.

"Quiet, fool!" hissed Sommers. "Your death will come soon enough."

Feebly he tried to push Sommers away, then collapsed back against the wall, the sword's sheath jangling as it struck the wall.

Never had those men heard such cries. They were not the cries of a human being, they were inhuman, bestial. Kate's long, red hair fell down, her corsage was ripped, one sleeve was unbuttoned and bagged down over her hand. There was foam about her mouth, her lips were black with scum, and her eyes wide with madness. She pinched and scratched and kicked and screamed. . . . God, how she screamed!

Even when the soldiers had dragged her past the corner, those men at the chapel door heard her feet kicking the ground as she was pulled along brutally by the wrists. Scream upon scream, continuously, breathlessly, the screams as of the damned they were, of something hurt beyond human endurance, beyond physical pain, it was pain of the soul, pain that destroyed the wits . . . screams of a mad woman, endless, almost soulless, meaningless, a release of emotions, of terror and love and agony burst from the cooping of the will and released in hysteria . . . scream upon inhuman scream . . . incredibly prolonged, incredibly terrible. . . .

The King in his royal pew hid his face behind his shaking hands: he was oily with sweat this cold day. And in the gallery, Culpeper, the coward, the cowardly Culpeper in an agony of shame and horror, shuddered against the wall, ready to collapse: he should go to her, should try to rescue her, should die rescuing her: closer, he pressed himself against the wall. Lean Norfolk stood amongst that white-faced group of men, and the cruel smile left even his thin lips. . . .

The place echoed and re-echoed with those cries, like a struck bell: the sound was there for ever, impressed

upon the very wood itself, upon the stone and the brick and the wood ; it would ring there through the ages. Pull down the old house, and even the bricks would keep the imprint of that impassioned will mad for the moment, crazy with dreams, all wrecked. . . .

Screams such as few men have heard, screams such as no man could forget. They can be heard there to this day.

THE EPILOGUE

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The Lover—The Husband—

He was a coward. He had been given his chance, and he had failed to take it. He was a coward. Nothing could wipe away that degradation. He had stood there while she was caught in the dirty hands of yeomen-at-arms, was dragged kicking and screaming along the floor, the sand from the stone embedded in her cheeks where she had fallen; he had stood there, doing nothing—nothing. He would never forget. Fate had contemptuously offered him his chance, and he had shuddered from it: nothing could redeem that cowardice. Dereham would have leaped forward with sword out and killed those two men. He would have died himself, of course, but death was nothing if it was noble. Man's belief in himself was everything; lose that and you have lost your soul, you are damned. Culpeper was damned, he had lost his soul, he was a craven. He had not taken the chance fate offered him.

He waited now for death with longing. Only death could redeem his soul, could cleanse it of that canker. And death held off. He remained with the King at Westminster, rode hunting with him into the fields in an effort to forget.

At first the King's rage had been terrific; he had wanted to kill Kate; but slowly his rage went. He would forgive her, it was said. The Lord Privy Seal mentioned to Chapuys, the Spanish Ambassador, that

Henry might show in this case "more patience and mercy than many might think—more even than her relations wished," meaning, of course, Norfolk, who cursed Kate on every occasion, demanding that she be burnt as a witch.

"She was but a child," said Henry one day to Culpeper when out hunting. "I could not touch her again. Always I would think of those other men, of Dereham and Manox, for Manox was no liar. He told the truth. I would always taste their kisses, think of them behind her eyes. No, no, I couldn't bear it. They must die, both of them. I will not have men living who have known the Queen. But it was all before marriage; I may divorce her, there was a precontract with this Dereham. . . ."

He was a broken man, this King. He could no longer look you in the eye. He was crippled with despair. This had been his last fling at matrimony, his most hopeful effort, and it had failed. He had nothing now to live for.

"And yet," he muttered, "yet I think she loved me . . ." and he blinked and gazed with a hopeful eye at Culpeper; but Culpeper could not reassure him: he turned aside.

Even now he might redeem his manhood if only he had the courage to say: "She loved me, she is mine!" But he had not the courage, and it would be a futile gesture. The great chance had been given him of dying to rescue her, and he had slunk from it.

With longing, he waited for his inevitable arrest.

When it came, he was thankful of only one thing—that it was not in Henry's presence. While he and the King hunted and rumour whispered, lying as usual, that Henry had ridden his horse towards Anne of Cleves' home, Marget Morton, Tylney, and Wilks were before the Council. Pressure was not needed, a hint of torture, of the branks—that gag that broke your teeth

and popped your eyes out—of the thumb-screw that slowly snapped your fingers, of the terrible rack, that trestle that gripped your legs and arms with ropes and gradually dragged them longer, of red-hot pins behind the finger-nails . . . just the whispea of torture in Wriothesley's cajoling tongue, and the women were broken. Morton mentioned little things, Tylney let slip other things, little clues pounced on by Wriothesley, Hertford, and Norfolk.

When Culpeper came back from the hunt he found a sergeant-at-arms and two yeomen in his chamber ; and he knew that his time was come to die.

He would redeem his failure. Chin in air, he strove to talk jauntily, but the laugh died in his throat, and suddenly he saw before him, more gigantic than honour, more fearsome than shame—death, death on the scaffold. . . .

But he won in the end. He smiled as he let them take him to the waiting barge.

Thus it ended. Their four lives were finished, and all that remained was for them to die. So far, the oxen, so far, the implacable Fates, Lucrece had turned from the knife, and the sword would fall for her, now that after-marriage was proved. Under the cold hoofs, both husband and lover ; under the cold hoofs, the wife ; and the second husband, the King, he too had fallen, not yet dead but sorely wounded. And with them had fallen a multitude of Howards, bullied, tortured before the Council. Great Norfolk was not yet to tumble from his greatness, he was needed at the moment, but the King was never to forget, and later would come his turn.

And all because a wanton had loved too well in youth, too foolishly in womanhood!

And as the cold mists rose from the sluggish river,

shrouding the tired sentries on the ancient palace called the Tower, hiding the shipping in the Pool, the great bridge with its jagged line of houses ; as the mists came from the river and the sailormen shouted when they sailed by, the sentries cried " All's well ! " when the guard came shuffling, blowing on their hands, and grumbling, with the clatter of armour, as they took their stands ; as the drab November days passed so slowly, Culpeper lay in his cell, guarded on every side.

He did not know where it was he lay. He saw no more than stone walls and the slit of the window above. He knew that he was in the Tower of London, but he did not know in which part. He was unable to move, for his limbs were useless, bones torn from their sockets, tendons and muscles strained and bleeding.

With closed eyes he lay and let the hours drift past, waiting for death to release him ; honour and all, his own cowardice and his great love, all were forgotten in the longing for death.

Torture had wrung the truth from his blackened lips, but in his rage he flung the weight of his despair upon Lady Jane.

Lady Jane had conspired with him, Lady Jane had urged him to love the Queen, Lady Jane had cajoled him, she was the demon. . . .

He told the truth, he flung it at Wriothesley, but not all the truth : even when he could barely think, when all his body was a blinding pain, he still remembered to say that he had not known the Queen carnally, always he remembered to say that : his honour was not completely gone.

Bones dragged from each socket, at every turn of the rack he shrieked because the slightest movement brought pain clawing at his heart. Wriothesley leaned forward, scribbling, shouting questions, abuse. It was very dark. On the table next to Wriothesley a candle

shone gently, undisturbed by the noise and the screams of agony ; the roof was hidden in blackness ; high up in the slanting wall, the narrow window sent down a diffused glare that gradually dissolved into a million curvetting motes ; down through this window came the noise of the guard snuffling in the cold, his armour clanking as he rested on the wall ; the cries, "Who comes there?" the gruff answer, then "God save the King," and "Amen." The rack creaked at every pull on the lever, as the pawl slipped into a whelp. Culpeper's wrists were tied to a rope, his arms pulled over his head, and the rope was passed under a roller, ran over another roller attached to the lever, then over a third roller at his feet ; the other end of the rope then being tied to his ankles. With his own hands, Wriothesley gripped the lever, put his feet on the edge of the bed, and pulled, turning it into whelp after whelp. . . . My God, such pain was not possible for a man to bear ! And when he could bear it no longer, and collapsed, he was torn from the engine, flung on to the cold floor and drenched with water.

For hours he lay on the cold floor while Wriothesley dug at him, kicked him, questioning, questioning . . . but he would not say that he had known Kate carnally.

Back to his cell, and before the bones had time to knit, the muscles to ease, he was carried once more to that dark chamber where Wriothesley sat and where the long bed of the rack waited.

He could not well remember his trial. In the Guildhall he had sat next to Dereham, a Dereham more broken even than he. Half-blind with pain and exhaustion, he heard the words of the indictment and tried to understand what they meant.

"That Katharine, Queen of England, formerly called Katharine Howard . . . an abominable, base, carnal, voluptuous, and vicious life like a common harlot. . . ." The lights raced in front of his eyes :

red, yellow, blue, scarring a black wall. What was that man saying? " . . . she led the King by word and gesture to love her (he believing her to be pure and chaste and free from other matrimonial yoke) . . . arrogantly coupled herself with . . ." The words died, came again deafeningly against his ears, paining them," . . . falsely and traitorously held illicit meeting and conference to incite the said Culpeper to have carnal intercourse with her . . . more secretly to pursue their carnal life they retained Jane Lady Rochford late wife of Sir George Boleyn late Lord Rochford as a go-between to contrive meetings in the Queen's stole chamber and other suspect places and so the said Jane falsely and traitorously aided and abetted them. . . ."

The voice droned to silence, like a drowsy bee. Culpeper raised his head. He heard the rustling of papers, hushed voices; then somebody laughed, very loudly, fiercely. Next to him, between the steel-clad guards, Dereham kept his head erect by a terrific effort, but the effort almost destroyed his consciousness, he could barely see or hear. The Lord Mayor in his robes seemed to swell like a bladder in his seat. How red his face was! Red as blood, a blood-red sweating thing above the scarlet robes. Wasn't his name Michael Dormer? Or was Michael Dormer killed? There was Norfolk, a forced sneer on his thin lips. On the right hand of the Mayor, the Lord Chancellor Audeley; on his left, Brandon, old Suffolk, who had such a pretty young wife: he *should* be there. The Lord Privy Seal, arrogant Southampton; black Norfolk; Sussex; Hertford. . . . How their faces swayed! Somebody was talking. Culpeper heard the words, but not their meaning. He did not even know who spoke.

Into his sore ribs a hard thing was jabbed brutally, and he looked round, puzzled. A guard was pushing at him with the blunt end of his spear.

"Get up, man," said the guard. "Stand up!"

Somehow he got to his feet. What did they want with him now? Dereham was shaking beside him. With all his wits he tried to understand the words, and caught familiar sounds.

"... plead ..."

They wanted him to plead, and he moved his lips, muttering his answer. Somebody's ear, fleshy, with red veins, came close to his mouth.

"He says: Not guilty, my lords."

"And the other prisoner?"

"Not guilty, my lord. ..."

Thank Christ they let him sit down. Somebody began to speak, and slowly the words came to Culpeper. They were telling him what Kate had said, things about him. Kate had told them everything.

He staggered to his feet; again that fleshy ear came close: he could bite it, it was so close; all red and furry, it was.

"The accused wishes to change his plea, my lords. He pleads Guilty!"

"And the other prisoner?"

"The same, my lords—Guilty!"

The delicious peace of sitting down again! Better to plead guilty if Kate had told. What did it matter if they knew? Better to plead guilty. It would not stop the forfeiture of his goods, but it saved him from being damned as of base blood. It wouldn't matter to Kate. And now they might stop torturing him, might let him die in peace.

Voices, the rustling of papers. He must set things right. He must tell them what they were doing.

He must speak, must set things right.

To stand on his feet meant that every muscle was like hot iron burning inside his flesh, but he got there somehow, and croaked:

"Gentlemen . . ."

There was silence in the Guildhall. Everybody gazed at him. He licked his lips and shut his eyes to stop the lights from bombinating, from running up and down the walls in flares of colour.

"Gentlemen . . ."

He took a deep breath.

"Gentlemen!" he cried a third time, and with the word, blood came to his mouth and dribbled on his unshaven chin, "do not seek to know more than that the King deprived me of the thing I loved best in the world, and though you may hang me for it, she loves me as well as I love her, though up to this hour no word has ever passed between us." He swayed. Hold the lights steady! hold the lights! Stand back, Norfolk. Your face fills everything. They must understand. He had lost his love. Surely that was torture enough without the rack? "Before the King married her," he cried, "I thought to make her my wife!" he gasped, rubbed his hand over his lips and blood stuck to it. "And when I saw her lost to me, I was like to die; you all know how ill I was. The Queen saw my sorrow and showed me favour; and when I saw it, tempted by the devil, I dared one day while dancing to give her a letter and received a reply from her in two days, telling me she would find a way to comply with my wish." He shouldn't have said that. Besides, it wasn't true. Why had he said it? the devil in him, the devil of pride; the coward, the coward Culpeper. He must leave Kate out. With glazed eyes he looked around, from watching face to face, and he knew then the hopelessness of trying to make them understand; they didn't want to understand. These men had never loved, not really loved.

"I know nothing more, my lords," he muttered, "on my honour . . . as a gentleman. . . ."

He heard Hertford laugh and say jeeringly, "You

have said quite enough, Culpeper, to lose your head. . . ."

SENTENCE of death: To be taken back to the place from whence they came—both of them, back to the Tower—and thence drawn through London—for all to watch, all to jeer at, to make an apprentices' holiday—to the gallows at Tyburn, and there hanged, cut down alive, disembowelled, and (they still living) their bowels burnt, beheaded and quartered. . . .

Nevertheless, it would be such peace to die.

CULPEPER did not know it, but in the next cell, Dereham lay. Dereham was blind with pain. He had been tortured for weeks, but all the torture that Wriothesley could create had been unable to make him say one word against the Queen, save that they were married. After she was Queen, nothing criminal had happened; he swore it.

As he lay there in his little cell, memories drifted before him. Lambeth on a spring day and young Kate nestling in his arms. He had done his best to make her happy. He had brought this agony upon himself in an effort to keep her happy. If only he could see her, if only he knew what they had done to her. Wriothesley merely laughed when he asked him. He would never see her again now, not on earth. And he did love her so. He loved her more than anything in the world, more than himself; he had sacrificed himself in a stupid effort to keep her happy. It had been a gesture, an heroic gesture, and Dereham had lived for such things.

His head lolled on his shoulders, terrible pain rippled along every nerve in his body. They were making death pleasant for him, at any rate, he thought grimly. And they had honoured him with a cruel end, an end to boast of—it was almost a patent of nobility to be drawn, hanged, and quartered. A man was a

gentleman if his ancestor had suffered such a fate—but Dereham had no children to leave his heritage to. It was wasted on him, he thought, and winced with pain.

THANK God, the trial was over. Culpeper, a thick wall between him and Dereham, prayed his thanks at the thought that he was condemned and that now the torture was over.

And as he lay there like one already dead, scarcely breathing—for every breath meant pain—he heard steps outside, heard the clattering of metal. Was he to die to-day? Thank Christ, thank Christ. . . .

Strong men lifted him from his straw pallet.

"Don't make me walk," he whispered. "Please carry me. . . ."

So they carried him down the stairs, a torch roaring ahead of them, whirling black smoke to the roof. Down stairs, down corridors . . . and again, the dark chamber, the calm candlelight shining on Wriothesley's bowed back, and in one corner—the rack.

Culpeper screamed. He had not known that he had the strength left to scream with. But that same chamber of hell, that rack, that calm Wriothesley sitting there bent over his paper. . . . O Christ!

They laid him on that wooden bed, stretched his legs, pulled his arms over his head, firm hands bound his wrists and ankles; he heard the machinery creak and whine. . . .

O Christ . . . Christ!

TEN days of further torture. They had not said enough to damn the Queen when she came to trial. Wriothesley wanted facts of after-marriage, and he never got them.

Dereham would not answer; Culpeper, determined to redeem that shame of his, bit his tongue through rather than let his cowardice conquer him again.

With his own hands, Wriothesley tugged at the rack; he snapped their fingers in thumb-screws; hung them up by their arms, their arms pulled up behind them, bearing the full weight of their body; he poured water ceaselessly down their throats until they vomited up almost their own stomachs; he broke their limbs on the wheel. . . . But they did not speak.

The women were tortured: Tylney, Morton, they swiftly told all they knew, but it was not enough; Roger Cotes was caught and kicked and released as useless; Damport had the branks forced over his face, a steel mask with spiked metal tongue that smashed his teeth and, when screwed, pressed on his forehead until his eyes swelled through their lids: but he told nothing; he stood by his friend to the finish and repeated only worthless tales, never telling the facts they wanted of after-marriage. Damport just jeered at them, when they flung him, broken and maimed, into a cell, alone.

From nowhere could they get the truth, the truth that would smash the Queen and, mayhap, tear down great Norfolk.

It was nearly Christmas. On 10th December 1541, Culpeper and Dereham were laid on trestles and dragged by horses to the gallows at Tyburn, through crowded London streets, through mobs of crying women and cheering men, until over the country roads they were bumped towards the distant Tyburn. Too exhausted to be afraid, to understand anything, save that blessed relief was coming closer with every crack of the horses' hoofs on the cobble-stones, they lay on the trestles, every lurch over every bump striking frightful agony through their crippled bodies; they bore it without a murmur because they knew that they were soon to leave the world. And they rolled their glazed, wondering eyes in their thin, peaked heads from face to face of the mob that ran beside them.

The King out of his gracious mercy had commuted Culpeper's sentence to losing his head, without the other details, but Dereham's sentence remained entire : although he had pleaded for mitigation, he was still to be drawn, hanged, disembowelled, and quartered.

And that cold December morning they died at Tyburn, these men who had loved too greatly for the world to understand. They died, and their heads, being the heads of traitors, were stuck on poles and placed next to the chapel on London Bridge to be pecked at by crows, and to rot there in the rain and to parch in the sun until the skin dropped off and the bones poked through and the teeth grinned—grinned above the ceaseless traffic on London Bridge. . . .

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

—The Woman—

THE NEWS REACHED KATE. It was whispered to her fiercely by her half-sister Isabel, for Isabel's husband had been given command of the Queen's person while she awaited trial. He had done good work with Anne Boleyn in her last days, and was expected to do good work again. From Hampton Court, Kate had been conducted to the dispossessed nunnery at Syon, on the opposite side of the river to Richmond Palace. It was in ruins here and there, after the vandals had been at work, and only a few of the chambers were capable of being cleaned for her reception. Lady Margaret Douglas, having disgraced herself with two Howards, had been imprisoned there for a time, but now she was sent under the care of Lady Richmond to Kenningdale, far away in Norfolk. Her servants had been taken from the Queen, and she had only four gentlewomen and two chamberers to tend her, and one of the gentlewomen was Lady Isabel Baynton, her half-sister.

Before she left Hampton Court, all her ladies and servants had been gathered into a room to hear the tale of her wickedness, but Kate was past feeling ashamed.

Only now when Lady Isabel told her of Culpeper and Dereham, how their heads rotted over London Bridge, she pushed her hair into her mouth to hold back the screams that threatened to choke her. Dead, both of them, dead! those two men who had loved her! They were dead. She had cried continually that she did not care what came out so long as Culpeper was

not taken, and now Culpeper was dead. His skull was on London Bridge, and that young body, that strong, young body that had held her in its arms, that body was headless, rotting in a grave . . . so quickly, so suddenly. . . . She could not believe that he would never walk the earth again, that she would never fondle him and hear him say, "I love you, Kate. . . ."

She had been deprived of her prettiest dresses and been given only dark clothes without pearls or jewellery to wear. She was past feeling fear. The Spanish Ambassador, Chapuys, was surprised to see her looking so fresh, so undismayed. "Very cheerful and more plump and pretty than ever," he wrote to his master, the great Charles V. But Chapuys saw only the exterior; he knew nothing of the despair in her young heart. She knew that she must die. She said that she deserved it. Her one wish was that the execution should be secret and not under the eyes of the world.

She waited patiently for death, to pass the dark veil behind which Culpeper waited for her. She deserved to die. She had no love for life, now that the man she loved was gone for ever. And so she waited, smiling and unafraid.

They told her that both Lords and Commons had passed the act of attainder, and that the King graciously permitted her to plead before Parliament. The poor man, she thought, how he must suffer! And she shook her head and said that she did not want to plead. She only wished that in some way she could comfort the King, but that she knew was impossible.

And so she waited until the barge came to take her to London. At first, for one terrible moment, she understood the fate before her, and shuddered, crying, "No, no, no! . . ." but then she stood erect and said nothing more. There was no reason why a woman should not be brave.

It was cold and dark. A mist was rising over the river. Lifting her black velvet skirt, she stepped into the barge, leaning on Sir John Gage's arm.

And she sat, quietly smiling, as the rowers bent their backs and sent the boat racing to London.

Southampton, the Lord High Admiral, and others of the Privy Council, sat with her ; behind their barge came another, crammed with steel-clad soldiers under the command of the brave old Duke of Suffolk.

She felt very calm ; but as the boat neared the lights of London, she glanced suddenly up and saw the Bridge coming towards her through the mist, the Bridge on which Culpeper and Dereham had had their heads spiked ! My God, the Bridge. . . . Fascinated with horror she gazed up at it, but fortunately the night was dark, the mist very heavy, and the roofs were smudged out, so that she could not see the heads. Like a string of jewels, the lights shone from windows there. Behind those windows, goodly burghers sat down to supper. They lived so placidly and happily. Did they know that in the darkness a young woman was being rowed to her death ? Mists on the grey river, boats shouldering through them, blurred with fuzzy lanthorns, and above it all, the lights of London Bridge. And somewhere there, somewhere above those houses, the face of Thomas Culpeper grinned at the face of Francis Dereham. . . .

London Bridge swirled closer, was atop of them. She heard the boatmen shouting, holding out lanthorns over the bows, for this was the most perilous part of the trip. The steersman stood high, seeking the tenth, the longest pier, under the Chapel to St. Thomas of Canterbury. Then they were underneath, in the blackness. The current flung them along. They grated against the elm-stoutened piers. Kate saw the rubble on them, between the wooden piles, heaps of stones and refuse. Darkness, then suddenly they were squeezed out into

the mists again, and she heard the boatmen sigh with relief and pull more heartily.

She looked back at the disappearing Bridge, at the quivering lights and the great black mass of piers and starling ; somewhere there, high in the darkness, was the bodiless head of Culpeper. . . .

The lords disembarked, then helped her out with as much courtesy as if she were still Queen. Still Queen ! my God !

Over the moat, then under Traitor's Gate, into the shadows and up the wide stone steps. She raised her velvet skirts so that they would not lap at the water. She gazed around her, fearfully. Before her, the Tower—the great dark Tower of London. . . .

She kept herself upon her feet and did not weep as they led her along the gravelled paths under the heavy arches of the Bloody Tower and the Coldharbour Tower, towards the Queen's Lodgings.

And here, in the Queen's Lodgings, Kate's fortitude went. Within these walls, Master Culpeper had been. These walls had heard him under torture. Here Dereham had been ; here those two men she had loved had suffered unimaginable pains.

Like a mad woman, Kate wrung her hair and shrieked and ran about her chambers, tearing at her clothes, tearing at her own skin. Mad, she sat before the merry fire, huddled up, white-faced, only the eyes living in her head, her hands in her hair pressed over her ears as if to deafen the sound of her own cries. Gazing at the fire she sat, and now and then her full lips would curl, the eyelids would wrinkle up, and she would scream and shudder as if she saw vile things in the firelight. She would not eat or drink. Sir John Gage, Constable of the Tower, strove to comfort her. He was a kind man with gentle, nervous eyes under bushy fair brows, shaven cheeks and long, pointed

golden beard ; he did not like his task, and spoke shyly to her, eager to be of help ; but she only rolled her eyes at him and wailed and beat her temples.

It was not death she feared. It was the thought of Culpeper and Dereham, the thought of their poor heads on London Bridge, while she had been rowed beneath. She saw their faces in the fire, she screamed and tried to clasp them to her breasts. She was to die, so young, so young ; she was to die because she loved, and they had died, the men she loved. They had died, had gazed upon these walls and wept, as she wept now. Would God forgive her ? would God let her and Culpeper be together in the palaces of heaven ? Ah, God, God, it was not death she feared ; it was God's unswerving justice. Would He let her have Culpeper for one last embrace, even in hell, just for one last embrace ? . . .

On Sunday morning, Sir John Gage came again. He wanted the barber to shave her head, but she told them that she would kill any man who tried to touch her hair, and they did not press the point. He could screw her hair under the coif and keep it away from the sword.

She sat before the fire as if her cold blood would never warm, and she turned her eyes towards Sir John Gage with a terrible intensity in their glare—mad eyes, eyes that showed no soul behind them, glassy and frightening.

She was to die to-morrow, Gage told her.

Good news, good news at last ! She clenched her thin hands together and smiled, because she must die to-morrow. Good news, good news, Sir John !

" Sir John," she said, " you will not refuse the last wish of a dying woman ? "

" I will do all I can for your comfort," he murmured.

" Then do this for me as a last wish "—and her eyes still gazed unblinkingly upon him—" Let me see the

block, bring it here. I would not go to death unprepared."

He bit his lips. "I doubt . . ." he said.

"You must!" she cried. "You must!"

He bowed and left her, and she waited patiently, smiling with bloodless lips, until two guards came bearing the wooden block on which she was to die to-morrow.

"Set it down there," she said.

So they placed it there, on the floor, to where she pointed.

Sighing, she stood to her feet and went and caressed the wood. It was marked with jagged cuts where the axe had fallen crookedly, and was curved so that her shoulders could fit neatly into it.

And crooning softly to herself, she laid her head there, this way, that way, feeling the coarse grain of the wood chafing her tender skin.

KATE was not alone in the Tower, these cold February days of 1542. She had the Queen's apartments where Anne Boleyn had been, both for her coronation and her execution. These apartments ran down behind the White Tower, beginning at the Wardrobe Tower and running towards the Great Hall and the Lanthorn Tower; from the Lanthorn Tower the Queen's Gallery cut across to the Salt Tower, thus forming the Queen's Privy Garden: a slanting quadrangular plot of earth and flowers and greenery—brown now in winter—bounded by the Lanthorn, the Cradle, the Well and the Salt Towers. Kate was allowed only in the State Apartments, but she did not care, she did not need more than one room.

With her was Lady Jane, sent to spy on her. But Lady Jane was past spying; since her condemnation she was even more demented than Kate. She shrieked and was not still for a moment. She was doomed to

die with the Queen, and she could not bear the thought of death.

So many people were now in the Tower that there was not space for them all. Dozens and dozens of men and women had been arrested, tortured, tried, and sentenced because they knew of the Queen's sinful youth and had held their tongues. Even Lord William Howard was recalled from his Ambassadorship in France, and with his wife, Lady Margaret, and his sister, Lady Bridgewater, was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment and forfeiture of goods. The Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, of course, was there too; but as she was busily scratching up eight hundred pounds for the hungry Wriothesley, there were hopes of her being pardoned. Numerous lesser people were caught: brother Charles was banished from the Court; Damport, after being forced to swallow some of his own teeth and being nearly blinded by the branks, was perpetually imprisoned and lost his worldly goods. The women, Kath Tylney, Marget Morton, Alice Wilks, Joan Bulmer, Anne Howard, and Margaret Bennet, suffered the same sentence for knowing of the Queen's early misconduct and not talking about it; Edward Walgrave, who so lightly had loved the maid Baskerville, with William Ashby, the Dowager Duchess's servant, all suffered the like fate. Manox had long since been executed.

Even Norfolk was afraid, and his son, the egg-faced poet Surrey, stopped mooning to his Geraldine to curl his ginger whiskers in public and to ride swaggering through London streets to show how little he cared what fate might fall upon his traitorous relations; and Culpeper's people followed his example and laughed uproariously and wore their gayest clothes.

Sad days in the Tower of London. People who had known of Kate's early life with Manox and Dereham,

and had been discreet, were swiftly caught and screwed by the bony hand of Mr. Secretary Wriothesley; and only Mary and John Lascelles escaped, as an encouragement to future informers.

And all because this woman with the little body had loved before the King had looked on her.

The King was almost mad now that he knew of Culpeper's villainy. He wept openly in council, a broken old man. Once he shouted for his sword and cried, foaming, that he would kill the witch.

"That wicked woman!" he shouted, and his voice broke into a scream. "That wicked woman! She had never such delight in her lovers as she shall have torture in her death!"

He would have killed her had she been near. He was mad with despair. The world had gone, all the flowers and sunlight and beauty of the world were no more. He was an old man, alone, unloved. His anger left him, and he wept. Great tears fell and quivered on the points of his short, golden beard that was streaked with grey. His hands shook. He had loved her so. She had been everything to him, his rose without a thorn. So confidently had he looked forward to a restful home, to living his last days peacefully, sweetly, in the glow of her youth and beauty.

"I blame my councillors in this!" he cried suddenly.

They had cheated him. Why had they told him? why hadn't they let him live in peace, even if peace had meant lies? And all the time that he'd loved her, while he held her in his kingly arms, her body was thrilled like a harp with the memory of other men's caresses, younger men's. He'd pass a law making it treason for any woman not a virgin to marry the King. If she had had a son by Culpeper, it would perhaps have come to this throne of England! A Culpeper upon the Tudor throne!

And he had so trusted the lad, so loved him. . . .
Those two together !
Purple with rage, he shouted for his horse, and rode no man knew where, into the leafless winter forests. . . .

It was early morning when Sir John Gage came for Kate where she knelt before her confessor, the Bishop of Lincoln, John Longland, the same in whose palace at Lincoln she had made merry with Culpeper, the same that Henry not so long ago had chosen to proclaim his happy married life.

Kate was not afraid, and walked bravely into the raw morning.

Mists had risen from the Thames. It was too dim to see the Bridge, but she did not look up. Dressed in black velvet, she walked past the Coldharbour Tower towards the Chapel of St. Peter-ad-Vincula, for outside its door the wooden scaffold had been erected on which stood the block.

She did not flinch. Before her strode the headsman in black with the black mask on his pale face. She had said that she did not wish to have her eyes bound : she wanted to die with the world still in her eyes. She had the same executioner that Anne Boleyn had had, a Frenchman brought all the way from St. Omer, who used the sword and not the axe.

Every step drew her nearer to her death, but she was not afraid. Calmly, before these lords and knights and gentlemen, with Lady Jane Rochford tottering behind her—Lady Jane dumb, mad with terror—very calmly Kate stepped up on to the scaffold and looked her last upon a cold, misty earth.

A great many people were gathered around her with bowed, uncovered heads, and they heard her breathless voice, stuttering a little, as she strove to speak firmly and clearly.

" Brothers," she said, and blinked to hide her tears.

"Brothers, by the journey upon which I'm bound, I have not wronged the King." She paused and mused a while. Let him live on in peace, the poor old man, he had had little peace so far. "But it is true," she added, her voice rising, firmer, almost exalted, "long before the King took me," she cried, "I loved Culpeper, and I wish to God I had done as he wished me, for at the time the King wanted to take me, he urged me to say that I was pledged to him. If I'd done as he advised me to, I should not die this death, nor would he. I would rather have had him for a husband than be mistress of the world, but sin blinded me, and greed of grandeur; and since mine is the fault, mine also is the suffering, and my great sorrow is that Culpeper should have had to die through me."

The tears came now. She could not hold them back. She must die quickly before she was weakened with memories.

"Pray, pray," she cried to the headsman, "pray hasten with your office."

And when he knelt before her, begging her forgiveness for the act that he must do, she wailed, feeling her weakness grow upon her.

"I die a Queen," she cried, "but I would rather die the wife of Culpeper. Good people, I beg you pray for me."

Kicking her heavy skirts aside, she fell upon her knees before the block that was draped with a dark velvet pall; she raised her clasped hands over her breast and prayed, and wept openly; and as she prayed, the headsman lifted his long, clean sword on high behind her; and all held their breath.

She heard the sound of its falling through the air, the gentle rustle of wind, and it struck her neck with a shock of sudden blinding pain. . . .

It rolled away, that little head, and the long red hair came unbound and rushed with it. And the blood

gushed out, fountaining high into the air as the trunk writhed and fell, twisting, the gristle and sinews muddled like snakes, scarlet and spouting blood. The head lay still while the body writhed ; only the mouth moved up and down as if talking soundlessly, the eyes were open gazing blankly upon a world that they did not see.

Lady Jane screamed as they led her over the bloody ground, and the executioner seized Kate's head and held it aloft by the hair so that all could gaze upon the head of a traitress. From side to side he held it, that little head that with its beauty had brought such doom upon itself and upon so many others ; in the executioner's strong fist it swung, whitening every second as the blood dripped out ; even the red lips—moving up and down, still moving up and down over the little white teeth—even the lips grew pink, then grey ; the eyelids were stretched far back from the empty blue eyes, their lashes seeming extraordinarily long and very black against the chalky brow and cheeks.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

—*And the Bed*

IT IS SPRING THE NEXT YEAR—July 12, 1543—and once again in Hampton Court the bed is to be made according to the ancient ceremony. No longer may the task be scamped by the yeomen eager to eat afterwards in the ante-chamber : now they eat as they work, eat gingerly so as not to spread grease on bed-linen or on the tapestries. Mr. Harman stands and watches them.

To-day, another royal marriage has taken place, the King's sixth marriage. Tired and exhausted with his battle with life, Henry had now chosen a woman who would be a mother to him. Twice a widow, Katharine Parr was still beautiful, and although she loved Sir Thomas Seymour, her woman's heart was so touched with pity for the broken King that she could not refuse him when he came and knelt before her. It was whispered in the court that she had shuddered from him with the cry, " It were better to be your mistress than your wife ! " But that was only gossip. She pressed her lover Seymour's hand, and bade him wait. The King had not long to live : he was old and very ill and tired of life.

Katharine had been married twice already. Her first husband had been Sir Edward Burgh, and on his death she had married Lord Latimer, an elderly widower with children ; he died early in 1543, and she had turned merrily to her lover, Tom Seymour, when the King chose her.

He was a broken man, this King. He wanted comfort and peace, for he was sick of a world that had

always cheated him ; and in Katharine Parr's arms he thought that he might again become a child and die peacefully with a child's trustfulness. He did not love her, but she was kind and motherly and beautiful. And she held his hand in Hampton Court before Bishop Gardiner and with soft voice she swore, with him, to be " bonayr and buxom in bed and at board, till death us depart."

So the great bed must be made and searched with a dagger for this bridal night of a tired King and a merry woman. And Mr. Harman stood there, quietly watching the yeomen.

As on a night some years ago, he heard steps approaching in the ante-chambers and stiffened to see who dared disturb this solemn affair. He thought it might be Tom Seymour, and prayed to God that it was not so.

But it was Will Sommers's white face that peered through the door, his eyes feverishly bright.

He beckoned to Mr. Harman.

" Go away," said Mr. Harman, " I can't see you now."

" I can see you," said Sommers, " but seeing's not what I wish. I want to whisper in your ear."

" I'm busy," said Mr. Harman angrily, " go away."

" I won't go away," said Sommers. " I'll go to you if you won't come to me."

Groaning, Mr. Harman went to him.

" Well ? " he grumbled. " What is it ? "

Will Sommers caught him by the gold chain round his neck and dragged his head towards him.

" Do you remember the pact we made once ? " he whispered. " A pact to discover God's purpose in life ? "

" Yes," said Mr. Harman testily, looking back over his shoulder to see that the work went forward, " I remember that stupid business. What of it ? "

"Well," said Sommers, "I have discovered that purpose!"

Mr. Harman was startled and gazed at him in perplexity. Was it possible? Yet God chose His instruments peculiarly, and often wisdom came from a fool's mouth.

"What is it?" he asked with a touch of awe in his voice.

"All I have seen tends to one purpose," whispered Sommers. "I can see no other."

"I am waiting," said Mr. Harman impatiently.

"It is—it is to make one, Will Sommers, hang himself with his own garters as speedily and as surely as possible!"

The jester burst into a sudden high lunatic laugh, and swinging on his heel, ran swiftly away, leaving Mr. Harman to stand dazed in that bed-chamber, automatically crossing himself and feeling a breath of terror chill him to the bone.

Behind him, the yeomen spread the blankets, the sheets, and tucked them firmly in place, kissing each spot that their impious hands had touched. And beside the bed-head, they placed the kingly sword, according to old custom—surely a queer custom? For that was not the sword that had severed Katharine Howard's little neck, nor Nan Bullen's.

That was a different sword.

HERE COMES THE KING

In a Court dominated by Henry VIII's unpredictable passions, not even the Queen, Katherine Howard, was safe.

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